

LOVE-BIRDS IN
THE COCO-NUTS

PETER
BLUNDELL





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LOVE-BIRDS IN THE COCO-NUTS

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE FINGER OF MR. BLEE
OH, MR. BIDGOOD !

THE BODLEY HEAD

LOVE-BIRDS IN THE COCO-NUTS

BY PETER BLUNDELL



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TO
A. M. BUTTERWORTH



LOVE-BIRDS IN THE COCO-NUTS



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CHAPTER I

I LOLINA, want to write a novel, an irresistible, fascinating novel, a novel for readers old and young. I should like to win the approbation of your archdeacons, of your actor-managers. I want my photograph to be exhibited in your shop windows, and a place for me reserved in your Westminster Abbey. I want, in short, to write a novel that will make me famous among you. But several are the obstacles.

For one, not the plot. I have a story to tell, a true story, a story that may bring tears to many an eye. It may also call forth blushes—the story, not the telling of it. If it does I shall be sorry. Can I—little acquainted with the manners and thoughts of English ladies—hope to avoid blundering into the region of the better left unsaid? The boundaries of that region are invisible to the untrained eye of an Eastern woman. I can only tell the truth and hope for the best. But if I tell the truth I shame the devil, so your proverb says. So difficult is the path of the novelist, it seems to me. I feel like a maiden standing shivering on the

steps of a bathing-machine with all the ocean in front of her.

I will be brave.

At Sudora there are no bathing-machines. Farther down stream, where the big, smooth river makes a final bend and sweeps in the grand manner out to sea, bearing on its bosom trunks of palms, nipa husks, torn branches, brown leaves of giant ferns, the debris of forests, on a ribbon of silver sand which the warm clear water laves but never lashes, there certainly is an old bathing *pagar*. Beside this Europeans are wont to picnic on Saturday afternoons, revelling half-naked in the sea air, the sun and the sand, beating up snipe and plover on the flats, drinking the milk of green coco-nuts obtained from the grove of palms close at hand, where brown-skinned Malay fishermen and their none too timid spouses dwell in huts of yellow reed under the shade, and extend to all a generous hospitality.

But the port of Sudora itself knows nothing of such amenities. It is a place dedicated to the great god Work. Mangrove swamps border the immense lagoon on whose edge it lies. A flat and rather uninteresting country is spread out at the back, a country made for the spade, where planters plant, and miners mine, and tin and rubber and gambier and coffee flow like milk and honey down to the water to be shipped.

Sudora is the port of shipment. That fact explains its existence and also perhaps its ugliness. For it is ugly. There it lies, a scar on the face of nature, an honourable scar perhaps, earned in the battles of civilisation, but a scar, nevertheless. And the jungle

hates it. The jungle daily, ceaselessly, strives to envelop and efface it, sending hosts of matted creepers crawling towards the houses, hordes of white ants tunnelling underground, fleets of submarines in the shape of teredos to undermine and weaken the timber jetties. But so far these efforts have been unavailing. Sudora stands erect, its yellow embankments garnished, its red painted iron godowns smiling hideously on river and on railway station, like the face of the good Queen Bess, arousing respect but not desire. Although no longer young as age goes in a new country the town looks new as ever. Like many of us, it has spread with the passing years. The jungle, far from conquering, has been beaten back, in some places for miles. And at these points have sprung up suburbs where the turf is orderly and trees and palms form bowers, wherein are established certain quiet places of entertainment, at which the youth of the district are wont to assemble of an evening in order to play billiards or listen to the gramophone under the light of the yellow moon.

And when I write "youths" I do not mean the red-haired, pale-eyed strangers who flock to my country to seek wealth, but rather the young Eurasians born in the place, whose dark brows, raven hair, pallid, dusky complexions and slight but interesting figures must ever win a certain interest from the traveller who wanders thither.

Ferdinand Fernandez! What a name! Lovers' blushes, Spanish castles, mantillas, elopements, *duellos*, cathedrals, united for ever, O my Ferdinand! Does he know how close to romance his name brings one? It seemed not that afternoon, at any rate. "You

may wager your tall hats on thatt," he called out to those in the rickety little bungalow in answer to some remark or other, stopping at the palm-sheltered garden gate and waving his topee. He could not see those within : a huge purple bougainvillæa hid the veranda. But their eyes were on him and he seemed to know it.

" Dear Ferdinand," murmured Amy to her mother, putting aside a branch with a plump yellow hand in order the better to observe him. " How his teeth glitter in the sunshine. I hope he won't stay out for tea."

" You will be in to tea, won't you, Ferdinand ? " cried Mrs. Fernandez in a voice which, although shrill, accorded well enough with her comfortable person.

" You may wager your tall hats on thatt also," he replied gaily with a last flourish of his topee.

" What funny remarks Ferdinand makes now sometimes," observed the girl, still staring out towards the gate.

" He learns every day from his European friends," returned the mother complacently. " I hope, though, his progress in English language will not make him proud."

They watched him mount his bicycle and glide off down the road.

Business called him to town every afternoon except when there was work in the surrounding countryside to be attended to, an event that occurred but seldom, for the plantations were in the habit of undertaking their own building operations, and Fernandez & Co., Contractors, relied principally on odd jobs given them by the Government in the town for support.

Mr. Fernandez, senior, was the firm, Ferdinand its right-hand man. Youth as yet prevented him from being eligible for a partnership, in the firm's opinion ; but not in Ferdinand's, so his friends gathered. Ferdinand believed, it seemed, in young blood, in up-to-dateness, in discarding the slow, casual methods of the Portuguese half-caste and adopting something a little more American. But Mr. Fernandez, senior, like many other old men, like most old trees, was firmly rooted, difficult to budge, refusing altogether to grow. He would not, for instance, move his office from over that Chinese general store in the main street. Ferdinand did indeed manage to get a large brass doorplate put up, similar to those used, so he had heard, by contractors in the Strand, London. But, on the first day after erection, the dazzle and novelty of the thing had caused a pair of Government bullocks to lose their customary calm, and dash along with the lorry they were drawing, headlong into a shop opposite. And, in consequence, the old man insisted on having the plate taken down, in spite of the fact that the firm obtained the contract for the repair of the damaged shops.

It must have been galling to a youth of Ferdinand's temperament to be yoked to such unprogressiveness, but to give him credit he seldom showed the world his impatience. A flash of his dark eyes now and then, a faintly sarcastic smile often visible as he looked at the older man, a chance word, meaningless to those not well versed in his affairs, these alone pointed to an inward chafing.

It was not, so his friends understood, that he wanted

the business to expand, that he wanted more work, in short, but rather that he wished to see the firm and the Fernandez family occupy a higher plane in Sudora, that he wanted them to follow him in his flight towards things European. Work ! There was always enough of that to keep him busy going round on a bicycle, to tie the old man for a goodly portion of the day to the large drawing-board which, flanked by formidable T-squares, level, rule, and compasses, occupied a place of honour in the office. Work !

Sometimes the old gentleman himself would complain of being tied, declaring a wish to spend the day at the Grotto—that was the name of their bungalow—in slippered ease. But Mrs. Fernandez, who believed in employment for men, and who possessed an all-compelling tongue, would always drive him forth, nevertheless, after breakfast into the blinding sunshine. She must have known that the habit of work in an Eurasian is easily broken, and taken her measures very early. At any rate the old gentleman held a reputation for steadiness and industry unique among the Eurasians of Sudora. He was, too, a religious man at bottom, though he swore sometimes after the manner of the Portuguese, which is not a bit English. He dressed neatly in threadbare but scrupulously clean white duck ; and he wore glasses on a nose that might have been Don Quixote's. Ferdinand considered that he was rather too friendly with Si Hock, the Chinese shopkeeper underneath, their landlord. But then Ferdinand did not like Chinese shopkeepers, who seemed always to look through him or past him with their sluggish, penetrating eyes, and smile.

Si Hock, standing at the colonnaded shop front, just out of reach of the hot sunlight, was smiling now as it might have been at the white, dusty street. The sound of a person engaged in an annoyed soliloquy proceeded from the window above, a sound perfectly audible to the entire neighbourhood. Ferdinand, looking shocked, drew up by the curb, that is, on the other side of the large cemented drain that skirts the pathway, a drain into which all the Chinese shopkeepers are accustomed to throw garbage in spite of the warning of the sanitary authorities, stood his bicycle against a brick column, and with a curt nod passed into the shop.

He ran upstairs. "Father!" he said in a pained voice.

"I've lost my glasses," explained Mr. Fernandez, who, with head bent, was walking about the little office. "Everywhere have I looked." He certainly seemed to have. Paper, books, and instruments strewn the boarded floor, flotsam after a gale. "Where in the name of the apostles I——" began Mr. Fernandez again, mopping his forehead in excitement.

Ferdinand surveying him, smiling faintly, did not let him proceed.

"Keep your hair on, father," he advised, interrupting. "Let me see what I can do for you." And he too, gingerly because of the dust, joined in the search.

"I put them on the drawing-board half an hour ago," muttered the old man.

"Perhaps the rats have eaten them," said Ferdinand

rather testily. A hot place this office, calling forth perspiration ! And he had on a clean white suit.

Presently he straightened himself, and going to one of the windows unlatched and pushed open the rough plank shutter that covered it. Sunlight at once flooded the room.

"We shall see better now," he remarked, blinking. But though the cloistered gloom in which the old gentleman delighted to work was now gone, though every little defect in the office from insect-bored rafters to mouldering floor now stood out, looking brazen and horrible, the search was as fruitless as ever.

"What shall we do ? " asked Ferdinand. "I can't stay here all night. I have my engagements. Great Scott and Dickens ! Let us leave the glasses ! To-morrow we will search again."

"But I must get them to-day," returned the old man. "I have a letter to read."

"I can read that for you, father," pointed out Ferdinand. But this letter seemed to have been mislaid too, and for quite another minute the old man was busy again. Presently he rescued it from a heap of papers on the floor and handed it to Ferdinand.

"It is from Mr. Pawker at the rubber estate, about this new contract, I think," he remarked. "That is why I was so angry. I wanted to see what was in it, quick. And my glasses had disappeared."

"He says he has almost decided to give the contract," said Ferdinand, reading. "And will let you know for certain by hand messenger before six o'clock to-night. This, I perceive, father, from the stamp on the envelope, came by the post."

" You are quite right."

" This will be a long way out at the estate, this work, if we get it," murmured Ferdinand, a shade despondently, perhaps.

" You have your bicycle."

" That is true, father. But my legs have to shove it, and the days are warm ones. I get to feel rag-like after too much bicycle."

" You know our Government work is falling off," pointed out Mr. Fernandez. " We must do some business for our coolies. This new magistrate, Mr. Baylers, seems to be against giving work to contractors. He wants the Government men to do it all themselves. They are all grumbling, I hear. But it always is the same with these magistrates. A new broom makes a clean sweep ! "

" I heard somebody call this Mr. Baylers a dirty sweep," said Ferdinand moodily, fingering his downy upper lip. " That was the chief clerk. The chief clerk does not like him. He says he is always shouting and bullying at the office, trying to make people work."

" Then he will be very unpopular with the community here," prophesied Mr. Fernandez, beginning to straighten up the office again.

Ferdinand did not offer to assist in the task, but stood rubbing one foot to and fro over the dusty floor. After a while he yawned and announced that he had engagements elsewhere.

" You will come back here before six o'clock to arrange for the work of this new contract at Mr. Pawker's ? " urged the old gentleman. " I know he wants the work begun without delay."

"But you have not got the contract yet, father," pointed out Ferdinand banteringly. Nevertheless he gave the required promise, and having borrowed one dollar from the firm—the old man gave it him without demur—gracefully took his departure.

Bicycle beneath him—a modern centaur—he wended his way through tortuous streets lined with gaily-painted shops. Chinamen standing smoking in the shadow of mottoed doorways viewed him unconcernedly, a naked child or so stopped playing to turn and stare after him, pointing with podgy hand, two mangy dogs, braving the sunshine, rushed out into the baked white roadway, barking and snapping.

Ferdinand, a thorough master of his machine, kicked at these latter as he went along. They retired, dismayed but noisy still, and from the seclusion of the gutter watched the enemy reach the boundary of Chinatown and glide into tree-clad country. At an increased pace and swaying gracefully he pedalled on, a faint smile still on his dark young face. Palm groves and banana plantations engulfed him. When he again became visible he was standing at the gate of a small inn.

No, no, no! It is not a small inn! It is a very fine hotel!

Gentle reader, I must confess to you. Never before have I written a novel, and so I have hired Mr. Nubkins, the novelist, who knew us all in Sudora and who now, I understand from him, is a celebrity in this your great city of London, to assist me. He calls this place of entertainment, not knowing, a small inn. It is a fine hotel! It used to be my hotel! And Ferdinand, that day, he came to see me!

CHAPTER II

HOW very difficult to interest others in one's personality as much as one is interested in one's personality oneself. And yet I must make people be so through this printed page. They cannot see me, they cannot come within my atmosphere. Yes, yes, they can do, but not in the way I should like, not in the way so many have ever since my childhood. For even from the first, so they tell me, and I know it is true, a glance withdrew from me only to return. I was like sweet flowers that the bees revisit, that the moths hover over. A night flower, yes, I, dark-haired, large-eyed.

And I was graceful too, even when a child, even in those far-off days, the memory of which more resembles that of a dream than of the actual.

The house we lived in was a dream, like a palace—marble floors, looking-glasses, long, with gilded edges, gazing into which I used to spend sometimes hours during the heat of the day. And my sister, too, she was there, changing from one gaudy *sarong* to another, from a silken *baju* to a linen one, putting on her heavy ornaments of beaten gold and making attitudes in front of the glass. And she would ask: "How do I look?" And I would reply: "*Chantek, chantek*," or "*Bisai*," which of course means beautiful.

She was a lovely woman with coiled black hair and

a face round and feline, resembling mine ; I might say like a tigress, but you wouldn't, as we do, think that praise. And she was caged like a tigress in that big stone house. Nothing pleased her for long ; and she had everything her master thought she could desire. Only her freedom was taken from her. Our mother sent her there, giving her me, child of an unknown father, to try and take the edge off her captivity. But she would never submit. She was not one of those fat, town-bred Malay women who mind nothing so long as their stomachs are full. She came from the hills, where streams plash over the rocks, and the Javanese robin sings. And she, a captive, pined.

Both of us hated the owner of the house, who made us hide when he had guests. I never heard his name. Somebody belonging to the bank I believe he was ; and often merchants and other Europeans with their mems came to dinner, and we looked at them through cracks in the doors, hating all, especially the mems. The memory of those days makes me smile rather now, but still my breast heaves when I think of that man. Pig, that visited the coco-nut grove at night ! Coward ! Thief ! Was my sister a sore that you should have hidden her thus ?

He accused her of treachery at the end. If she had been treacherous was he the one to blame her, he who taught her habits of stealth and secrecy, he who taught her to hide ? What did she hide from him ? I can only suspect, I was too young to know. But I remember so vividly, so very vividly that last night. Her fierce screaming woke me, and I leapt from the sleeping mat, screaming too. I wasn't more than eight at

the time, and the darkness and the fear of disaster terrified me. I ran into her room. The electric light was full on, and she was standing under it half-naked. That pig had a whip raised in his hand about to strike. And then from somewhere out rushed Ahmat the syce, with a knife. Ah !

You didn't know that, Mr. Nubkins, when you offered to assist me in writing my novel. You thought doubtless, because I am a staid, respectable woman now, that my past had been one big yawn. It is not too late to withdraw your help if you wish. There are others who will help if you will not ! I can find them. Meanwhile I shall go on writing this chapter myself, and shall trouble no one for help. For this happened to me. Still I can see it, and, seeing, am able to describe.

Yes, still I can see the stunned and wounded Englishman lying there face downwards, his body half-curved up, his white suit stained with blood. Still I can remember the rush through the house, the packing of the spoil, the hurried journey through the shadows to the sea. Ahmat, my sister, and I fled barefoot. It was a calm, dark night. The tops of the palms were just visible against the sky. Now and again the breeze rustled them. Even that made us afraid. Every sound made us afraid. We feared pursuit, and often through the night, when everything was very still and we walked like ghosts on the velvet turf by the roadside, we would halt as if moved by a common thought, and turning, listening, gaze affrighted into the shadows we had left behind.

But nothing happened. I think it must have been

that the Englishman was more shocked than hurt and that when consciousness came back to him he decided to forego revenge for the sake of avoiding scandal. I think, perhaps, knowing these people as I do now, that he was drunk when he struck my sister.

We embarked unmolested and sailed for Pelung. We landed. Nobody looked at us. Nobody pointed to Ahmat and said : " This is the murderer of a Tuan." All were busy about their own affairs. The place was seething with work.

So many people, so many colours, such babel, cries of hawkers through the streets, tinkling of bells of the bullock wagons, rickshaws swaying and twirling hither and thither. Every colour was brightened, every bit of metal on the harnesses, the carriage axles, the dresses of men and women was transformed into a glittering gem by the sun. We were dazed, all of us. Stupid as owlets at noonday we wandered along the pavements, jostled at every step, half-choked by the dust and the close, strange odour of the thronging shops. And then towards evening Ahmat was spoken to by a Malay who said he knew him, and this man piloted us to the Kampong Selim and found us lodgings for the night.

I was ill then ; and when I awoke we were poor, all our belongings gone. Yes, very poor, and Ahmat was a great gambler. I was so thin ; it was fever. And my sister had a boy-child in her arms. She was no longer a tigress ; she was tame and very sad. Nearly all her beauty had departed, so much so that when we wandered out through the streets, as we did almost daily, she never covered up her face but merely

walked with head bent. And no man looked after her, so altered was she, so sallow and so old. The child gave her no pleasure. Ahmat, when he spoke to her at all, reproached her with it, pointing to a dreadful birthmark on its left leg, just above the knee, a mark, so he said, of her shame. He taunted her with being a white man's cast-off, and my sister would sit, her head on her hand, saying nothing in reply. But he seldom troubled to speak, being so much engaged with his gambling. I grew to hate him even worse than I hated the Englishman; and when smallpox took him away not a tear shed I. But my sister wept, being weak and broken. And the smallpox attacked her too. A Kling doctor came with a hospital cart and took her and her baby away. I never saw her again.

The missionaries, praise be to them, found me and rescued me. It was they who taught me to read and write. They christened me Lolina, and they were very kind. They said I was their prodigy, marvellous to learn, marvellous in speaking the English language, so they said, like a European. But as for adventures in that "retreat," well, I was as dull as—as a sausage in a grocer's shop.

I was glad when they sent me out to service; I was gladder still when I met my late husband Roga, old as he was. I was glad, for he was very much in love with me—an old man's love that gave everything and wanted but little in return. All I wished for I had, comfort and safety. And when, after we had been settled at Sudora for a year or so, the time came for me to close his eyes, eyes that would never look at me

again, then I cried, for never were two greater friends parted.

My enemies have often accused me of being a little inclined to stoutness. I answer them that nothing they can say will worry me. I snap my fingers at them.

Even during my widowhood at Sudora, when I was proprietress of the hotel, I was not too thin.

I was not much more than thirty when Roga died. My voice, then, as it is now, was a deepish contralto. My face, my hair? Well, read this novel and learn what others thought of me. No, I will let you understand at once, not to keep you in suspense. Often after four o'clock in the afternoon the bar-room at my hotel would be crowded with men, who drank my drinks, paid for them, and went away happy to bed if I so much as threw them a smile. I believe they would have drunk anything had I smiled more. I could have made vast profits, but I was too honest. Only because of my smiles. And there were no other women in the hotel. Now you know something about my looks when I was thirty years old.

There were nights, of course, when not so many came. But Ferdinand Fernandez was a regular visitor. He was a youth anxious to improve his knowledge of the world, and he had found that he could do this by talking to me. Often, when he was there, Europeans from the rubber estates adjoining, seamen, and Government warders would come in, and he would talk to them also about the world, especially about London, a place he was very interested in.

He used to pick up their expressions. For instance,

when he appeared on the evening that I (or rather Mr. Nubkins) mentioned in the first chapter, I said in greeting :

" Oh, is that you, Mr. Fernandez ? "

" You may wager your tall hats on that," was his reply. Such a stupid saying, because I had not a tall hat so far as he knew, though as a matter of fact my late husband's old one was still by me. But it was a saying all the rage just then among Europeans.

Ferdinand looked very well that night, I remember. In spite of his dark complexion he is a handsome boy. And he was always fond of me. I liked him for this fondness, and I used to pretend fondness also. But nothing, of course, in earnest. People engaged at hotel bars must leave their hearts at home. Such a pretty, clean boy, I must say it again ! He was, too, like a young cockerel ; always on the crow and always proud of his appearance, always moulting old clothes and buying new ones. On this particular evening I noticed that he had replaced the blue pugaree on his topee with a white one, following in this respect the last fashion from Pelung.

" You do look spruce to-night, Mr. Fernandez," said I, in fun. " There'll be some broken hearts in Sudora."

" What ? " said he, faintly smiling and flushing under his dark skin.

" Why this, of course," I said, bending over the bar and tapping the topee on his head.

" Oh, that ! You are a noticer, Mrs. Roga."

" I like pretty things."

"That explains the reason to me why you have such a fondness for yourself."

"Oh, Mr. Fernandez," said I, surprised at his quickness. "Where have you been practising? You are quite the Londoner!" I gave him an extra wide smile, shewing my gold eye-tooth, which the ordinary customer never sees. The hotel was empty except for two young Chinese, who were playing billiards at my table near the door. They were strangers, and in any case nobody takes any notice of Chinese.

He glanced round and, seeing that he was not observed, leant over the bar, looking very pleased with himself.

"One never practises with ladies of your graces, Mrs. Roga," he said, and then drew back, aghast at his own boldness, I suppose.

If I had not known he was such a good, harmless fellow I should have drawn back also and started polishing glasses with a duster. But as he was such a boy and was only, I knew, behaving like this because he thought fashionable people did so, in a motherly whim I took off his topee, held it out of his reach, and examined the new pugaree.

"It is so neatly put on," I remarked with my head on one side, bantering him. "Who could have taken such trouble for your sake? I'm sure I would not for any man. Whoever put this pugaree on is a beautiful sewer. What's this on the brim? The mark of a fallen tear? Ah no, merely a little dirt."

"Give me back it," he demanded shamefacedly, and darted out a hand.

But I was ready and held the topee out of reach.

"A bit of dirt! What a desecration! So near to where those fairy fingers have been at work. Who is she? Is she pretty? Must I be jealous?" Only in fun, you understand.

"Give it to me back," he insisted. I could see now that he was smiling only because he thought it was the correct thing to do. Inwardly he was discomposed and, so his side glances told me, fearful that some of his friends should surprise him. But I am such a tease, even nowadays.

"Tell me her name first then," said I, with a laugh, and held the topee just out of his reach.

"Tell you her name, missis! Not much. But I tell you this: you're not the only pebble on my beach," he said.

The impudent fellow! I was sorry I had shown him my gold tooth. Perfectly well I knew who had put on the pugaree. It was his fat sister, Amy Fernandez. And he was trying to pretend otherwise. I gave him his topee.

"Did you say you would have your usual lemon-soda, Mr. Fernandez?" I asked coolly. Selling refreshment was my business, after all, not talking to stupid boys. He nodded and thanked me, looking rather scared at my displeasure. I opened the bottle, poured out part of its foaming contents, and placed the glass in front of him. After a sip or two he began, I saw, to regain confidence. But he got no more gold tooth from me that day. No, I am very stern with impudent people.

I left the bar counter and, sitting on my high stool, took up my knitting. The bar counter is semicircular

and very beautiful. Sometimes sitting on that high stool I used to feel much as a rose-tree in the centre of a garden bed must do. On that evening I felt so. The sun had come down the sky and was looking in at the windows. Our windows out in that hot country are unglazed. Every bottle, every bit of glass, every piece of polished wood about the bar was shining and flower-like. I had on a white satin blouse cut rather low, and I was wearing my necklace of large pieces of red coral strung separate, a necklace that still looks well against my creamy neck. Outside I could see the green lawn, sheltered here and there with palms, where my customers often sat of evenings when the moon was up. It was on my advice that my late husband, Roga, bought the little green tables and iron chairs which dotted it. I was very fond of these tables. They were one of our successes, giving an air to the hotel and, I am sure, tempting Europeans to patronise it.

I sat and looked at these green tables that now threw long shadows on my well-kept lawn. Where they stood under shelter sunlight played through the leafage above, over their cold iron tops, in combs and diamonds. The evening breeze was springing up, stirring the fronds of the palms. The air was growing cool. All felt delightful. And the click of the billiard balls soothed me. Such a thing is peace.

I looked down at my knitting, and then my eyes—it shows how little they wished to look at Ferdinand—shut. Some people may say that I was dozing. No, I was merely contented. All my faculties were at rest.

The stopping of the click, click at the billiard table

made me look up. I watched the two Chinamen pay the marker, and then saunter out on to my lawn. They should have paid me, but they were strangers and doubtless did not know my custom. And then I saw them sit down at one of the green tables reserved for Europeans, where no Chinamen, even the richest towkays, are allowed to sit. Such behaviour could not be allowed !

"Tell them to go away," I cried out to the marker, pointing. The uglier of them had just lighted one of those poisonous Chinese cigarettes. The smoke was blowing right in, polluting the whole hotel.

The marker (he was a little Malay who had been a long time with me) went out and spoke to them very nicely for a Malay—a Malay is always so rough with a Chinaman except when he wishes to borrow money. I heard him tell them that they must not sit at tables reserved for white men only. But they merely laughed and sat on, pushing him to one side. I grew very angry and, jumping off my stool, ran out.

"Go at once !" I said. "*Orang bangsat ! Babi ! Pigs !*"

I can be very angry when I wish, and have often frightened people. Ferdinand, who had followed me, called them also pigs and scoundrels. But they did not appear to mind, so thick-skinned and shameless were they. They sat there with hunched shoulders, grunting out insults, and so at last I got out of patience and, rushing up to one of them, pushed him over on to the ground as he sat on my green chair.

"Go, or I will call the police," I shouted ; and Ferdinand Fernandez ran and cleverly slapped and

kicked him before he had time to get up, and Mahomet, the marker, flourished a parang and stopped them from attacking us. So at last they went, giving us such displeased looks, and saying that very shortly they would return and demolish us.

"They won't come back," said Ferdinand after they had gone. "I gave them too much biffings."

We walked slowly to the bar. I was very much out of breath and had lost all my contented feeling. I was not so sure as Ferdinand about the Chinamen not coming back. They might enter the house at night. That was one of the drawbacks of being a widow. She is defenceless. I told Ferdinand of my fears when we reached the bar, and he very kindly offered to stay as long as possible, or, if I wished, to call in the police.

But I dislike going to the police. "They will do nothing but live on bribery and blackmail," I said. "My late husband, Roga, paid hundreds of dollars just to keep them from getting us into trouble."

"Of course, missis," Ferdinand assented, "every flock has its black sheep to be found in it."

"They are awful, threatening me always," I went on to tell him. "But I refuse to pay any bribes. I will not be cheated by these policemen." And then I proceeded to relate how that only a day or so before the Sikh sergeant had come into the hotel and warned me about this new magistrate, Baylers, who had just arrived and was so strict in preventing gambling.

"You may bet your tall hats on that," Ferdinand interrupted me. "He is very noted for his stopping of gambling."

"I never bet or gamble," I said. "Nor do I allow

it in my hotel. I told the Sikh sergeant this when he wanted a bribe, but he said that if I would not spend money to prevent rumours spreading it might be that I would get into trouble. He said it would only cost me fifty cents a week."

"If it was that tall Sikh with the scar on his face, I should pay it," Ferdinand advised me. "He has the ear of the inspector. I know this from our Chinese landlord, who also pays his portion. My father also pays a little."

But I laughed and said that I would never do anything of the sort; for no woman should require to bribe, especially when her hotel was as respectable as mine was.

"A Sikh policeman would ask for bribes from his own mother. They are not sex-respecters like we males," Ferdinand returned.

We were going on with our conversation when, suddenly, from the door: "Can I get anything to drink here?"

I looked up with a start; and that was my first sight of Lloyd Guiy.

CHAPTER III

HE was standing near the doorway dressed in a new Chinese-made khaki suit, gazing around in the gentle, helpless way that is so like him. He looked like a sorrowful ostrich, or a reed shaken by the wind. I said he could obtain a drink, and watched him come towards me. He moved as if apologising to every fly on the floor for disturbing it. His eyes were cast down, but, when he reached the counter and raised them to look at me, I saw they were not small and shifty as I had expected, but pleasant, and of a soft, very clear blue. He had a moustache, one of the modern tooth-brush ones. For the rest, he was tall, fair, and slender, and, I should have said, about twenty-two.

"What can I get you to drink, mister?" I asked.

"Er—can I have a glass of old English ale?" he inquired. He said "glarse," like so many young planters, not "glas" like the Scotch engineers of steamers, who, I may also remark, seldom drink ale, saying it is bad for the liver, but drink whisky continually. He was a young planter, I decided. But to ask for *old English ale* at a hotel bar in Sudora! How many provide it? None. So new was he to the East. However, by chance I was able to oblige him. I had a bottle of old English ale. It was very old; left behind by the previous proprietor of the

hotel when my late husband Roga took it over from him. I had kept this bottle in a cupboard, and now, you see, it became useful. One never knows in the hotel business. We have our triumphs, like conjurors.

"I thought it would be so weird, don't you know, to have some old English ale in a tropical place like this," he went on. And then quite by accident he glanced in Ferdinand's direction. That one glance was enough to break the ice. I saw Ferdinand, who is always ready to be sociable with Europeans, pick up his glass and come walking along by the counter.

"And how's the old village?" he inquired with a friendly nod at this new customer.

"The old village?" The gentleman was at a loss: I could see that.

"The smoke! London, mister!" explained Ferdinand. He got out his tin cigarette-case, put a cigarette in his mouth, and tried to light a match on the match-stand with his right hand while offering the case with his left.

"Not just now, thanks very much," said Mr. Guiy. "London's looking very well," he went on, "or it was when I passed through. Everybody was very gay, both Houses, of course, sitting, and the chestnuts were out in the parks. I wish I was there now."

"So do I," returned Ferdinand, getting his cigarette alight and puffing vigorously. "I didn't know they allowed the chestnuts out in the parks, though. That must be since the present Government got in, wasn't it?"

You see, already he was trying to get more information about London.

"The flowers, you know," explained Lloyd, looking rather mystified.

"Quite," said Ferdinand, but I'm sure from the way he said it he didn't understand. And then I heard him make enquiries concerning the Dustbin, the Bent Poker, Willie's, and other strangely named places, houses of entertainment in London, I believe. Apparently Mr. Guiy knew nothing of them, nothing like so much as Ferdinand did, at any rate. Ferdinand's knowledge of these London places is astonishing, considering he has never been farther away from home than Pelung.

"They've got a new barmaid at Willie's," he told us, tilting his topee over his eyes and flicking the ash from his cigarette. "A man just out from home informed me of the fact last week. His Gracious Majesty, the King, God bless him, has granted the previous barmaid an old age pension. Of course they may not keep such a good selection of wine at Willie's as they do at the Dustbin, but Willie's is more select. Fastidious people prefer it to the Dustbin. I myself like select places. I myself——"

"Ah, of course, quite right," said Lloyd Guiy. "About my order: may I trouble you?" This to me, for would you believe it, I had forgotten all about the old English ale! I bent down to get it, but twilight had already darkened the shadows and the cupboard was full of bottles. I left the bar in order to fetch a lamp.

It was then, when I had turned my back for an instant, that the trouble began. From the kitchen I heard first of all strange voices shouting out numbers,

satu, dua, sa-puloh, dua-puloh; then Ferdinand's voice, very shrill and high-pitched; and after that the noise of tramping feet. I ran back, my heart in my mouth.

What a scene for a respectable hotel! There were six Sikh constables, seven, counting the sergeant. Those two Chinese were there, held by the constables, but not resisting at all. On the floor were scattered cards and dice and counters. Of course it was all arranged, that was apparent to everybody. And the sergeant's cunning, hook-nosed, mahogany face, laughing at me! I can still see it: and I should like to slap it. All the Sikhs had beards and heavy turbans and puttees. Elephants swathed in khaki, they filled my bar. Their uncleanness thickened the air.

"What is it all about?" I cried indignantly. I was innocent, and they knew I was.

"*Lu* wish to ask that?" cried the sergeant in his high, querulous voice, gesticulating and affecting great anger. He said "*lu*" to me as one does to a Chinese coolie.

"Jungle pig, answer my question!" I shouted loudly. I was furious. "You think you can do as you please and make trouble, but, good, you shall see, you shall be shown, and before very long either, eater of bribes!"

"Look at the floor, look! If this is not gambling, what is?" screamed the sergeant.

"It's a conspiracy. You shall suffer for this," I replied fiercely.

"It is an order of the new magistrate. I fear nothing," he retorted. But the tremor in his voice

showed me that he did. These Bengalis—they call themselves Sikhs—giants in body, have small souls. I had intimidated him.

“This Tuan shall confront you before the magistrate,” I went on. “Do you accuse him also? How then should such a man newly come to the place know aught of Chinese gambling?” I pointed to Mr. Guiy, who was standing beside Ferdinand looking very surprised, but, I must say, not in the least alarmed at the turn of events.

He noticed I was referring to him. “What’s it all about, anyhow?” he asked, smiling.

“They charge this lady with keeping a gambling house,” broke in Ferdinand, who was in the grasp of two policemen and had turned very pale. “It’s a cheating and swindling by these swine-eating sons of money-lenders. The curse of Mahomet—I say, great Scott and Dickens, what do these devils mean by putting their filthy paws on my clean white jacket? Do you know I have laundry bills to pay? Is this your boasted civilisation? Tell me that, you sergeant?”

“I suppose they have a warrant and all that sort of thing?” Mr. Guiy asked me.

“Where’s your warrant?” shouted Ferdinand, taking up the idea at once. “*Tuan mau liat lu punya warran*’, defiler of oxen!” Clearly, like myself, he had forgotten until then that such a document was necessary. In any case I think it was foolish of us to have insisted on seeing it. Had we been content to bluster and bully we might have got the sergeant to leave the premises. I do not think it likely we should have succeeded in doing this, but there was a

chance. However, we had asked for the warrant and the sergeant who had been talking in his hideous sar, sar, sar (Bengali I believe they call the language), pulled the little piece of blue paper out of his breast and held it under my nose. I looked at it by the light of my candle; the quickly fallen darkness made that necessary. Yes, everything was in order, so far as I and the others were able to judge. At the bottom the signature, bold and freshly blotted, "S. Baylers."

"Good; you are able to see the magistrate's sign!" pointed out the sergeant triumphantly. The flickering candlelight rendered his quivering, excited face more evil-looking than ever. The sweat poured off it. As for us, there seemed nothing more to say.

"Speak, speak, clever ones," he went on, encouraged by our silence. "You see from this warrant that I can catch all of you. *Ya*, any one, black or white. *Ya*, Tuan Baylers isn't like other men. He does not know people's skin. He cares nothing for the colour of it. Even Europeans are the same, I am permitted to catch them."

"Tuan Baylers is an ignorant fool," I cried out, beside myself.

"Good, I will carry your remark to him," sneered the sergeant.

I bit my lip to avoid a retort. Enough evil I knew instinctively had already been spoken concerning me to this new magistrate.

"Can you tell me what they intend doing?" asked Lloyd Guiy. "I do wish I knew the language. You see, I have not much time to waste. I was going down to meet the steamer. There is a lady on board coming

to stay with our manager at the estate," he explained. "I've been told to meet her. My name is Guiy." (He pronounced it 'Gway'). "I'm a planter, or will be one day. I must be on the wharf when she comes in."

"The steamer's in by this time," volunteered Ferdinand. "I observed the signals before I left the town. I also, needless to say, have my engagements," he went on. "But they are all absolutely sat on owing to these sons of Belial—I mean, blighted policemen."

"But—are you sure? eight o'clock she was timed for."

"She has coolies on board and is to be early."

"But I shall be late. I must go." Actually he pushed aside the nearest policeman and made for the door. I own I was surprised almost into abuse to see them lay hands on him. I can understand now that his creased, cheap-looking khaki suit may have given them the impression that he was some sort of poor white, a ship's fireman, say. Probably they could not imagine a European of the better class wearing khaki in the evening. Whatever their reasons, the police did lay hands on him, and he, I am glad, glad to say it, struck fiercely the Sikh sergeant. What a row there was then! How he fought and struggled for such a slightly made fellow! But three of the strongest overpowered him. They would have hurt him had I not called out.

"This is awful," he cried after he had grown calmer. "Isn't there any possible means of getting away? Shall I offer them money?"

"Come, tell us what you wait for?" I snapped out

at the sergeant. "This Tuan has business and must go at once."

"What can one do?" said the sergeant sulkily. "I have already sent a messenger to call the inspector. Everybody must wait till he comes and gives his order. His is the ordering."

The fellow's words seem polite enough when put on paper, but his insolent looks brought me almost to the boiling point.

Later, when the messenger came back bringing the news that the Tuan Inspector was not at the office or at his house, I was more than boiling. It was shameful that a new-comer such as Baylers should keep us all shut up for hours like this, I told Mr. Guiy.

"If they don't let me go, I shall have to make a bolt for it. I simply must get down to the boat," he said earnestly. I believe he meant mischief still. He looked desperate. But with all those big Sikhs around him he would have had no chance in a struggle. They would have taken pleasure in knocking him about. I told him this.

"Do you think so?" said he, looking at them doubtfully.

"I'm quite sure," I replied. "Have a little patience; you will be released in half an hour."

I was not certain about that, but I could not afford to run the risk of having any more struggling and perhaps bloodshed in my hotel.

"What does it matter if you are a little late at the steamer?" I went on. "Being detained like this might occur to anyone. There will be plenty of people to see after your lady."

"It's not only that," he said in a low voice.

"Come then, what is it?" I asked. You may see from the way I put the question that I was half-coaxing, half-comforting him, as I used so often to do when my late husband, Roga, was feeling in the dumps. I am rather clever at coaxing, so they tell me.

"As a matter of fact I promised the lady I'd be there. She's a personal friend," he replied.

"Dear me," I murmured, looking at him. His face was the colour of a cock's comb. "It is so unfortunate. And in my hotel." I smiled at him in a motherly, comforting way, showing my gold tooth. "You have known the young lady for some time then?"

"Oh yes. For years—er—at least our families have. Not that I knew she was coming out East. There was no talk of it when I left home and I haven't been here three months yet. Quite a surprise her coming out, to tell you the truth. And she's coming to the same estate as I'm on. I'm on the Bitas Estate. She's to be a governess to the manager's child. A queer coincidence, isn't it?"

"That's Mr. Pawker's estate? I heard he was getting a governess."

"Yes, that's it."

"And her name? Do you think I'm too curious?"

"Not at all." But I believe he did. "Hamilton. Miss Una Hamilton."

"Una! What a pretty name," I remarked. You see, I wanted to please him.

"You think so?" he said uneasily.

I said I did. Oh yes, I myself also think that.

"It's not to be sneezed at as a name," chimed in

Ferdinand ingratiatingly. He had evidently managed to catch the last remark. He never does like being left out of the conversation, doesn't Ferdinand.

"It's kind of you to say so," said Lloyd Guiy stiffly.

"I've got a kind disposition," Ferdinand admitted. "Not that names matter to me. A man of the world has his eye on the face and figure. One can, I apprehend, get used to a name." Continuing, he remarked that although one might get used to a name or to a face, life was short. He went on to say that Una, though a good name, like most names ending in "a," such as Sarah, Martha, Jemima, and so on, was not in his opinion up-to-date like "Daisy," the name of the barmaid to whom His Gracious Majesty had just granted an old age pension.

So far as I remember, conversation ebbed after that. For a long time we stood silent. There was no breeze that night. Mist had hidden the earth, muffling the sounds of the jungle. The air was thick and polluted with lamp smoke. I felt hot and breathless, oppressed almost to the bursting point. It must have been nearly ten o'clock when the inspector arrived, getting on for twelve o'clock before we were finally released.

CHAPTER IV

MR. FERNANDEZ waited at the office for Ferdinand until six o'clock precisely. When the hour struck (the bells of ships in the harbour heralded its striking) he arose, impatiently pushed his instruments into their cases, drew to and bolted the creaking, whitewashed shutters, adjusted his topee firmly on his head, and made his way into the street.

His movements were punctual and regular enough for folk to set their watches by. Had the sun set without him appearing on the streets shopkeepers would have blamed the sun. Children welcomed his appearance, connecting him in some vague manner with the evening meal. Public-spirited men, Chinamen in the running for a seat on the Sanitary Board, looked kindly on him as he approached, feeling themselves in the presence of an institution older and more creditable to the community than even the town clock.

On this particular evening, however, no one gave other than a casual glance at that frail, bent figure as it plodded on. Folk in Sudora, interested in the strange, are merely approving of the good and beautiful. And the old gentleman with his mahogany coloured face, thin as a hatchet, his big white moustache, his frayed white suit, black kid shoes, and enormous pith topee, had been for years a part of the landscape.

But the observant would have noticed that evening an extra touch of dignity in the old gentleman's stiff but as yet undoddering gait, an intensified expression of pride and annoyance on his aristocratic countenance.

He had recovered his eye-glasses, he had received another letter from Mr. Pawker, he had been given the contract to cut the new main drain out at Mr. Pawker's, on the Bitas Estate. This accounted for the pride. Ferdinand was the source of the annoyance. Ferdinand had borrowed a dollar and had not come back. Such, the old gentleman must have known, was human nature, and, as a parent, been prepared to submit to in his boy. Unfortunately, however, Mr. Pawker was a business man and would not permit of work on the new drain being put off because of Ferdinand's intensely human nature. Mr. Pawker wanted the work started first thing next morning. And where was Ferdinand? There were so many things to settle, they ought to have been settled at the office, but as the right hand hadn't returned, Mr. Fernandez had instructed the *mandor* or foreman to come up to the bungalow for orders that evening. There were coolies, *changkols*, picks, shovels, baskets to be sorted out and transferred to the estate. And where was Ferdinand?

Mr. Fernandez put the question at once on his arrival home.

"He hasn't been in to his tea," said Mrs. Fernandez. "We thought he was with you down at the office. Do you want him extra specially, father?"

She took her husband's topee whilst Amy poured him out tea from the well-cooled pot which still stood

on the veranda table. He took the cup and half sat, half lay in a dilapidated long chair, stirring the tea pensively. A cool breeze was swaying the alamanda sprays that had pushed themselves through and over the rail, golden trumpeters of invading nature. The thin hair on his forehead stirred.

"Do you want Ferdinand extra specially, father?" asked Mrs. Fernandez again.

"Of course I want him," said the old gentleman. And then went on in tones that betrayed a certain satisfaction: "I have obtained a large contract—from the Bitas Estate."

"What, you?" exclaimed both ladies, surprised.

"Yes, me," said Mr. Fernandez, looking at them triumphantly. "There is no occasion to be excited."

"Your father's got a big contract, Amy," cried Mrs. Fernandez. "Oah, splendid! And how many coolies will you send?"

"Some twenty, perhaps. But I must talk to Ferdinand about it."

"Twenty: fine!" went on the old lady. "We shall have new dresses now, yes, we shall. I'm sure it's time you had a new one. And perhaps we will send you to Pelung. You want a change. You're looking pale."

"I think she's looking fat and well, ma," said Mr. Fernandez.

He was certainly correct. She did look fat and well, a credit to her parents. Plain to be seen from their gaze that both the parents were proud of her, of her bare yellow arms that filled her sleeves to bursting point, of her ample, curving bust, her broad, sallow face,

full of countrified good-nature, her jet-black coils of hair, her placid eyes.

"She's looking fine. She is just like you were once, mother," pursued Mr. Fernandez, possibly anxious to avoid the subject of dresses. "I can remember twenty years ago, before you——"

"Ferdinand says," broke in Amy, "that sometimes on dark evenings or when our backs are facing him he can't tell the difference, didn't he, mother?"

"Ah, that was before I had all this worry and trouble of being married that I was so like you," replied Mrs. Fernandez, looking pleased.

"He will be so glad you've received the contract, father," went on Amy, getting up from the table and gathering together the tea-things. She walked from the veranda. The movement shook the whole of the crazy little bungalow, but then even the walkings to and fro of the family dog did that. A door shut.

"She seems to never end talking about Ferdinand," observed Mr. Fernandez rather testily, as he looked after her.

"Well, she's very fond of him, as we all are," said his wife, sinking into a canvas chair, and taking up a brilliant coloured sock that she was in the middle of mending. "He's growing such a nice young man that I'm sure I would do anything for him. So much the gentleman, too; just like a European. Look at this sock now," she leant over and held it close to the old gentleman's eyes. "The colour of a butterfly's wing! Such a pretty thing!"

"It is," agreed Mr. Fernandez solemnly.

" You never wore socks like that when you were courting me ! "

Mr. Fernandez admitted that he never did.

" I can remember you with no socks, in spite of your high descent that you were always boasting of. You used to say that wearing socks in a hot climate was mere conceit and pride."

" Never, did I ? "

" You did, I assure you, Mr. Fernandez. Yess, yess, and such a worrying thought it was to me, I assure you, although I have never mentioned it until now. All the girls, my young lady friends, laughing continually and saying how easy my life would be, for I should be married to a fellow that would not require me to darn socks for him. If you had worn such socks as these," she went on, flourishing them within an inch of his face in a skittish manner, " I might have died of love for you. Who can wonder that Amy thinks so much of Ferdinand ? "

" You think she loves him ? " asked Mr. Fernandez, looking a shade concerned. " How could that be ? She thinks that he is her brother ! "

" Well, I wouldn't say that it was love," explained his wife, scratching her arm considerably. " It's more a sort of stirring, a sort of awakening. At dinner, now, I've noticed her take her eye off the pudding more than once, and look at him."

" Ah," reflected the old man. " A mother is quick to see. But she thinks he's her brother."

" It's instinct," replied his wife. " We females are wonderful when it comes to instinct."

She brushed her husband's thin legs aside and sat

down next to him on the long chair. "We must talk about this," she went on, in a determined way, tapping him on the shoulder. "Now the two are old they ought to be told. I hope he loves Amy. Perhaps it is a pity for some things that he ever came. Poor little mite as he was! But we love him as our own, that is so, yess?"

Mr. Fernandez bowed his head in acquiescence. "It was your fault though that he did come," he added, rather maliciously.

"My fault?" said the lady in a heightened tone. "Tell me, then, who it was that insisted on us beginning our married life with economy, that would not buy his rice from the Chinese shop, and was so clever that he bought from those strange natives by the sackful? Tell me thatt. Was it me or you?"

"Ah, well, it was a long time ago," muttered Mr. Fernandez, smiling reminiscently.

"Did I want to measure the rice in the sack before paying or did I not? Who was the fool who bought the sack by weight?"

One felt from the old gentleman's expression that one would not have to search far for the purchaser.

"Weighing it! Buying it! Ha ha!" laughed Mrs. Fernandez tauntingly. "I can see your face now when we heard that squalling during the night, and I held a candle while you shovelled out the rice and then pulled the poor mite out of the sack. Oah, you had such a foolish, foolish face, Mr. Fernandez! Buying it! Such an economical as you were, Mr. Fernandez!"

"It was a long time ago," murmured the old man,

laughing too. "You should have looked at the rice in spite of me. A wife's duty, my dear. And then you would have found Ferdinand."

"A wife's duty! So soon after our wedding. Who thinks of duty during the honeymoon? And do you remember," she continued, "that Tuan missionary coming to the house next day, and, just as he had wished us happiness and said he was glad we were married, Ferdinand began to cry in the bedroom?"

"Now you mention it, I do," acknowledged Mr. Fernandez testily.

"Ah, your foolish face when you were explaining to him——"

"Not so foolish as yours," put in her husband.

"Ah, I was much ashamed," admitted Mrs. Fernandez more soberly. "Especially when he went away unbelieving. He might have believed——"

"But it was a disbelievable explaining," said Mr. Fernandez, wagging his head solemnly. "No, I think we cannot blame that missionary. Who had ever known of a baby in a sack of rice?"

"Wasn't he a nice baby?" she went on in a vein of reminiscence. "And the mother, whoever she was, had cared for it well. I should have liked to have found out who she was. Would I not have talked to her! Ah, would I not?"

"Yess, yess, my dear," agreed her husband. "You would, but why should we care? We had the baby. He hasn't given us much trouble, and he's a nice lad."

"So he is," assented the wife placidly. "And such a gentleman. He's got a darker skin than I like, but, no matter what his colour is, he always looks the

gentleman. Yess, yess, Ferdinand's made for charming the ladies, I see that. And that's why I want to tell Amy about his birth. Let them know the truth or both may be disappointed."

"Shall we tell her? At supper to-night we can tell them both."

"Very well," said his wife, rising. "I will see about supper now. Come with me out to the *dapor*. This shall be a night of festival. Myself, I will make the sago."

She put out her hands and pulled her husband erect; then putting her arm in his she led him through the whitewashed living-room to the half-decayed wooden steps at the back. On the other side of the small patch of turf, known as the back garden, but in reality the worm-preserve for the household chickens, lay the cook-house. In its brightly lighted doorway the figure of Amy was visible as she bent over a saucepan and stirred the contents.

"Such a beautiful girl she is," whispered the old gentleman, as the two of them descended the stairs.

"That will be better for Ferdinand if he is lucky," muttered Mrs. Fernandez, pressing his arm. Clearly this youth, a foundling, had managed, in spite of his uninvited arrival, to win a way to the hearts of his adopted parents.

But though they may have been fond of him, their manner of watching Amy as she busied herself over the saucepan showed who was the centre of their lives, the apple of their eye. The father, his white head bent, stood against the wooden doorway smoking contentedly, whilst within the daughter, guided by the mother,

performed mysteries among the pots and pans. The wood fire flamed and crackled, replenished from the store of dried *bakau* wood on the rack above. Smoke crept up the grimy weather-boarded walls to the blackened thatch. A pleasant smell of cooking filled the air.

"Has he come yet, father?" Mrs. Fernandez would inquire from time to time.

"No, not yet," the old man would answer after a glance towards the bungalow.

"I do hope that I get this sago done before he comes." But later on this changed to "If he doesn't return soon the sago will be spoilt," a remark to be repeated oftener and oftener in tones eager at first, then disappointed, as the shadows outside deepened, as the evening wore on.

At last the moment came when the family had to choose between spoiling the whole supper and waiting no longer. They sat down at the table without the truant. All of them ate slowly, rather as if without relish. It was no new experience lately, alas! for them to sit down to supper without him. And this was to have been an evening of evenings. Anxiously they looked over the veranda towards the road, where the trees and palms stood stiff and eerie in the moonlight. All was very quiet. Occasionally a dog howled, occasionally an owl flew hooting by.

It was getting on for midnight when Amy's young ears detected the sound of a bicycle bell.

"There he is," she cried, rushing out and leaning over the rail. The garden gate over by the trees swung open. A dim figure clad in white appeared.

“ Is that you, Ferdinand ? ” she called out eagerly.

“ You may wager your tall hats on thatt,” came back the cheerful voice, as the young Eurasian hopped gracefully on to his bicycle and sailed through the moonlight up the path.

She ran back to her parents with the news, but Mrs. Fernandez was already heaping up the truant’s plate.

“ And I’m very glad we saved a little for him,” she said to her daughter. “ Nothing to eat since the middle of the day. Why, the boysie must be starving ! ”

CHAPTER V

THEY heard him run his bicycle underneath the veranda. A moment later he bounded up the steps and was amongst them, looking very pleased with himself. He tossed his topee to Amy ; it might have been largess from the manner of both of them. She hung it carefully on its wire nail. Her mother turned up the lamp suspended from the smoke-blackened beam that ran across the centre of the unceilinged roof, making the room by this act into a stage for him, the well-beloved. He stood in the centre of the floor for a moment looking from one to the other of them quizzically, the while smoothing the curl on his forehead.

" Father waited so long for you at the office," began Mrs. Fernandez in tones indicating curiosity. " But doan't tell us all about where you have been until you've had supper ; tell us just a little only. You must be too faint to talk much. As I was saying to father just this minute : ' Why, the poor boy must be famishing.' "

" You doan't look faint, Ferdinand," remarked Amy, drawing out his chair for him. She waited beside the table whilst he sat down, handed him chutney and the bottle of *ikan merah* as if solicitous to see that he started fair. He did start fair.

"You haven't——" began Mr. Fernandez from his corner after a while.

"S-s-sh, can't you see he's famished with hunger?" broke in Mrs. Fernandez warningly.

"I'm all right-o, top-hole," said Ferdinand, his mouth full of curry and rice. "I've been playing the deuce, along with a European friend of mine, what, what!" He waved his spoon playfully at Amy.

"Ah, is that all?" said the mother. "I do wish, Ferdinand, you would not stay so late with your European friends. But that's right: always play with respectable people. I'm glad it's no worse."

She walked across and patted the young man's shoulder.

"Worse?" asked Ferdinand, looking round at her, plainly a shade annoyed. "How could it be worse? The magistrate, Mr. Baylers, said we were the baddest lot of peoples he had ever experienced. And there were six policemen as well as the inspector. It was a regular rough house, I tell you, mother."

"Six policemen!" exclaimed Mrs. Fernandez in a higher tone. She looked at her husband with a mystified air.

"I wiped the floor with them," explained Ferdinand easily. "Great Scott and Dickens, they don't love me any more! You can bet your tall hats on thatt."

"Oah, I don't know what he means," wailed Mrs. Fernandez. "You are becoming so much the English gentleman nowadays, Ferdinand, and I'm such a stupid old woman." She shook her head in comical desperation.

"Well, you know then, father, don't you?" asked Ferdinand, in high feather.

The old man shook his head. "I hope you haven't been getting into trouble with the Government," said he rather seriously.

"Have a banana! have twenty bananas!" cried Ferdinand with an air of triumph. He pushed back his plate, produced a handkerchief, wiped his mouth, and then, toothpick in hand, turned and faced them. "You see, mother," he continued, "the police sergeant pinched Mrs. Roga up at her hotel and——"

"He pinched Mrs. Roga!" ejaculated the old lady. "What goes on! Is that where you've been all the evening, Ferdinand, up at that hotel talking to that shameless, fast woman? And your supper getting cold! Why didn't you come home before? You make me angry."

"But I was pinched too, mother," explained the young hopeful, winking elaborately at Mr. Fernandez, who did not respond.

"You ought to have come away at once, you shameless boy."

"Six policemen pinched me and then I wiped the floor with them."

"Six policemen p——"

"He means that he has been arrested, I am afraid," translated the old man.

"That's it! Ho ho! Ha ha!" cried Ferdinand with a delighted nod. "We were pinched, arrested, designated for the lock-up; under a false misapprehension, naturally."

"You, arrested!" cried Mrs. Fernandez in sudden

anger. "Oh, goodness! I never heard of such a thing!" She sank into a chair. "Oh, the shame to the family!" she cried, horrified.

"Under a false misapprehension," explained Ferdinand, looking at her a shade doubtfully. "There is no need for excitement. In the Strand at London, daily, gentlemen are wiping the floor with policemen and getting arrested. Every one is proud to know them, I assure you, mother."

"Arrested! Never have we had any arresting in our family before. I don't mind what it was for. And now the neighbours will point fingers of scorn at us, a thing I can never endure from them and never thought I should have to!"

"Doan't cry, mother," Mr. Fernandez urged, coming towards her.

"It's no use crying over spoilt milk," put in Ferdinand, less jauntily than before.

"Spoilt milk! Yes, that's what you are, you wicked boy, spoilt milk!" cried the old lady. She rose and paced the small veranda till the frail bungalow shook. "Whatt did I tell you, Mr. Fernandez? Di'n't I say, at the time we found him, that one never got something for nothing in this world?"

"I don't remember it. It is so long ago," quavered the old gentleman.

"I've a good mind to give him a good beating, the little wretch!" she went on, thoroughly upset. "You think you can come to this bungalow and laugh about being arrested. And staying all night with that shameless woman, when me and Amy were slaving for you at home. You little wretch!"

She gave Ferdinand a look of violent indignation. "I will leave him to you, polluted of a police constable. Thank heaven he is no son of mine!" she cried, and, clutching her daughter, she half-led, half-dragged her from the veranda. A bedroom door slammed.

"What's the matter?" gasped Ferdinand in a scared way.

"She is a particular," explained Mr. Fernandez awkwardly. "None of us have ever been arrested in our family. It takes some getting used to. She does not like it." He coughed uncomfortably and, walking away, made a pretence of putting into place a book or two that lay on the table.

"But great Scott and Dickens!" protested Ferdinand. "Everybody's doing it in London, so I am informed. Many gentlemen are before the beaks, as they call their magistrates there, Monday morning after Monday morning. Not her son! That's a nice thing to spit out at one's offspring at this time of the evening. She seems to me all sore point to-night!"

"She's a little overwrought," suggested the old man. "Your arresting is a sudden grief to her, especially as she had such plans for you, and now you go and get arrested and seem to like it. As a matter of fact—er—um—you are not her son."

"Whatt!"

"You are not her son," repeated the old gentleman, playing nervously with his pince-nez. "And also she is not your mother."

"But, great Scott and Dickens, what then am I? A false start? An unknown error? A—fancy springing these tidings on to me at this time of night!"

"Don't get too excited," said Mr. Fernandez, mopping his forehead. "In this climate it is of no use." He drew up a chair and waited until the young man had seated himself. "Now I must explain: it is nothing," he went on in a low voice, evidently feeling his way. "You are now a man, I think?"

"I suppose I am," admitted Ferdinand. "But what you tell me just now about my birth makes me a bit doubtful. It has produced a dizziness."

"I've always thought you a man," asseverated Mr. Fernandez. "And also a cool customer who knows a thing or two."

"Oah yess. I'm a cool customer right enough," Ferdinand agreed. He stretched his legs and smiled faintly.

"With you being a cool customer, and Amy almost a woman, having in fact arrived at the age of pub—pub—what is the word? You know more English than me. What is it?"

"Pub-entry; that's what you mean, father." Ferdinand, brightening immediately at the flattery, found the word without the least trouble. "You see, father, hotels are called pubs in England, and 'entry' means the walking in to get drinks. And we also have a law in England that 'children under a certain age cannot be served with drinks.' Therefore the age at which they can be served is known as the age of pub-entry, that is, the age at which one can usefully enter hotels. It is a fine language."

"Amy having arrived at the age of pub-entry," the old man went on doubtfully, "the time has come to

explain to you about your parentage. Putting the matter briefly, you haven't any."

"Whatt! Great Scott and Dickens!" Ferdinand was in the depths again. "I thought I had at least half my parents! Are you not my father? Are even you slipping away from me?"

"Of course you have parents of some kind," admitted the old man comfortingly.

"But you are not my father?"

"No, I am not your father," said Mr. Fernandez in a pained sort of way. "I am only your founder."

"My founder! Great Scott and——"

"I found you under the bed shortly after Mrs. Fernandez and me were married," explained Mr. Fernandez. "Don't get excited," he went on soothingly, putting out a restraining hand. "It is a thing might happen to anyone. Better to be found under a bed than on a doorstep, isn't it now? Doan't get excited."

"But you are telling me so bit by bit," gasped Ferdinand. "Tell me all at once."

"Some natives came to the door with a bag of rice and I bought it cheap," whispered Mr. Fernandez quickly. "We put it under the bed. In the middle of the night we heard a fearful squalling. Mother thought the cat had got colic. It wasn't any good arguing; it never was. She just pushed me out with her feet. I found the noise was in the sack, and crawled under the bed and listened. It was you. We lit the lamp all in a flutter and I pulled you out. When we had dusted you——"

"Dusted me?" muttered Ferdinand in a dazed sort of way.

"Yes, you were all over rice flour. When we had dusted you, we saw you were not white, but Eurasian like ourselves. No marks on linen to find out who you were. You were naked. Only that birthmark on your leg and the amulet you wear on your arm."

"Oh, miserable blighter!" cried Ferdinand in an agonised voice.

"It is nothing to worry about," Mr. Fernandez assured him. "Mother didn't mean what she said to-night. She is so very excited. We had already planned to tell you about your birth, and you go and get arrested. We all like you. Your birth doesn't make any difference. But now Amy is older we had to tell you. Don't be downcast," he went on. "Such a thing might happen to anyone. And we are all fond of you. Amy too," he added with, for him, rather a keen look.

"Amy too!" exclaimed Ferdinand, brightening. "In spite of my being without any parents? And I forgot, Amy is not my sister any more. So she is fond of me. Hum!"

"Her mother will tell her about your birth first thing in the morning," the old man said hastily. "She doesn't know yet. But it will not make a bit of difference to her feelings for you, I am sure."

"Yess, yess, she likes me, I know thatt," murmured Ferdinand reminiscently, looking out into the moonlight and allowing a faint smile to play over his features. He began to walk up and down. "Father," he said, struck by a sudden painful thought, "doan't tell her about my birthmark. I shall be a laughstock more than ever if people get to know I have a

birthmark. They will say it is a mark of shame. Oh, miserable blighter ! ”

“ You needn’t be afraid. Nobody shall know of that. And you mustn’t talk either. Nobody in Sudora knows. Nobody will know unless you are stupid.”

Ferdinand looked reassured. “ And nobody shall know. I shall be like an oyster,” he said firmly. “ As long as people doan’t know, what do I care ? Listen,” he went on, stopping to wave his arms. “ You have given me your family name. I know it is your family name. Amy told me. I will make this name well known in the Strand one day. Mark my words. Oah yess, I will, in spite of my piebald blood.”

“ I don’t want you to think wrong about your name, Ferdinand,” went on the old gentleman hesitatingly. “ We did not—er—christen you like that. I must tell you this because, if I don’t, perhaps mother will when you make her angry. We di’n’t christen you Ferdinand. You see, it was in this way.”

He approached, and grasped the young man’s arm, and drew him affectionately nearer. “ When we examined you and found no writings to show where you belonged, mother said to me : ‘ What are we to do with it ? ’ And then she wanted me to take you and put you under the missionary’s wife’s bed, because this lady had no children and was always saying how dearly she would like one. But I said, knowing the pride of even the best of Europeans : ‘ She wouldn’t like a black one, I’m certain of that, anyhow.’ And then I said : ‘ Can you tell me how many children we shall have ourselves, Mrs. Fernandez ? ’ She didn’t

know. So I said : ' Mrs. Fernandez,' I said, ' we shall keep this little fellow ; a bird in hand is worth two in the bushes.' So just to oblige me she did keep you, and none of the neighbours ever knew that you were not her own, except the missionary, who said nothing. And we called you Bird-in-hand, afterwards changed to Ferdinand."

" Bird-in-hand ! " exclaimed Ferdinand, breaking into sobs and smiting his breast. " Oh, great Scott and Dickens ! "

" No one need know that," remarked the old man consolingly. " Don't give way. Amy will think of you as Ferdinand. Only me and your mother know. We are both glad that we kept you instead of giving you away. You are a credit to us. Why, you are almost like a European."

" A European ! Ahoo, ahoo ! A European." He looked up. " How can I be a European now ? I have no more heart left for such jobs. Bird-in-hand ! If that rumour was rumoured among the boys I should be a suicider, that's what I should be. I should be a laughstock. Now I give up life as bad jobs. I don't care if my trousers go baggy at the knees. They can bag, and bag, and bag, I tell you ! Bird-in-hand ! "

" Don't take it too much to heart," urged Mr. Fernandez. But the wailing began again. Ferdinand was not to be comforted, and after a while the old gentleman lay down in his long chair and waited for the sobs to cease. When at last they did so, he changed the subject by inquiring about the arrest and when Ferdinand was to appear in court.

" Why, I don't appear at all," stuttered the youth in

a voice hoarse with tears. "Didn't you understand that? The magistrate dismissed us altogether; it was nothing at all, nothing. We are all friends. I was so happy coming home thinking what a good thing it was to be able to tell you that I had been one of the boys like they do in London. I shall never be one of the boys again. Ahoo! ahoo! Bird-in-Hand!"

"Now, now, now," cried Mr. Fernandez with a final pat. "Don't be stupid. Go to sleep, and tell all to us about it at breakfast in the morning. You'll feel better in the morning. I will speak to mother; she does not unnerstan' that the arrest was about nothing or she wouldn't have been so angry."

And by dint of pushing and patting he managed to get Ferdinand off to bed.

Somebody indeed must have whispered to mother during the night, for morning found her at the table wreathed in laughter. She had done her thick iron-grey hair with more than accustomed neatness, and wore a clean linen wrapper. Everything that morning in the bungalow seemed brighter, and the sun looked in, as its habit was, and bathed them all in one large golden smile. There was Mr. Fernandez in his white suit, appearing pleased with life, as became a healthy man at breakfast time; there was Amy, dark and blooming, sweet as a tuberoses, eyeing Ferdinand when he wasn't looking her way and eyeing her plate when he was. She too was evidently in the know. The foundling himself was talking all the time, ostentatiously gay like an india-rubber ball, but slightly self-conscious, it seemed, under the eye of his lost relations. And as befitted the male bird under observation of what might

turn out to be a prospective mate, he endeavoured to wear as bright a plumage as possible. Every incident in the story of the arrest became, as he told it, a feather in his cap. What a kicking, to be sure, he gave to the enormous Chinaman—who probably had several knives concealed on him. Extraordinarily clever too what he had said to Lloyd Guiy! He had abused the Sikh sergeant, apparently, and would have assaulted him but for the presence of a lady, and the inspector had quailed under his eye, as also, to tell the truth, had the dreaded Baylers.

“ I told him that for two halfpence I would investigate his legal position, oah yess, I did. I was not going to stand his nonsense, I assure you. And this young fellow, Guiy, he did what he could also, but of course he was more timid than I was, being new to the country. And when this Baylers said that he could not have this sort of thing occur in his district, I would have asked him how he would have looked were I to bring the whole of his constabulary before the British Speaker at Westminster Abbey, but I found it was not necessary to do so, because already this Baylers had called Mrs. Roga to one side, and they were having a fine conversing together, oah yess! and laughing too. I di’n’t hear what they said, but she did a bit of hoodwinking a greenhorn, I apprehend, for in the end of it he gave the sergeant a good hauling over his coals, and said we might retire to our couches provided we came up for judgment if in future we were caught again.”

“ What is he like, this great Tuan Baylers? ” asked Mrs. Fernandez, skinning her morning banana.

“ Oah, he is like any other Tuan,” returned

Ferdinand. " But he is a long, big man, with a square jaw that looks as if it should be shaved very often for a clean appearance, a nose like a mussel shell, and he has elephant's eyes. I don't like him, and neither does Mr. Guiy."

" Was he wearing a very large white topee, and a grey flannel suit with a collar ? " asked the old gentleman.

" Yes, he was ; how did you know, father ? "

" I saw this gentleman on my way home yesterday ; he was driving in a carriage. I thought it was some new passengers from the steamer. He had a lady with him. She was a very fair young lady, so young, with a big white sun umbrella, and she was laughing. She seemed so pretty, but I had not my glasses on."

" Perhaps his wife," suggested Mrs. Fernandez, very interested.

" There was some luggage on the box beside the syce," remarked her husband doubtfully.

" I wonder who she was," muttered Mrs. Fernandez, and, irritated perhaps by a pang of unsatisfied curiosity, she flung the banana skin at an old hen which, after the custom of the fowls of the Fernandez household, had wandered on to the veranda in search of food.

CHAPTER VI

IT is true that Una Hamilton was laughing as she passed Mr. Fernandez in the carriage. Who would not feel pleased on landing, a stranger in an unknown country, to find the resources of that country placed at one's service? Who would not feel well disposed towards its king?

And so she leaned on the cushions beside Sidney Baylers, and laughed at his witticisms, and smiled at the passing natives, and was very bright indeed. Nevertheless all the while in her inmost heart she had a feeling that she would never forgive Lloyd Guiy for his failure to meet the steamer. She felt extremely annoyed with him. He always was a casual sort of individual, she knew that, but to fail a girl who had come some ten thousand miles was being casual in the superlative degree. Casual wards in workhouses were built, so she told herself, for supercasuals like Lloyd Guiy. In saying this she merely repeated a remark made by her stepmother, a lady who was in the habit of saying extremely cutting things out loud.

It had been speeches of such a kind, made very loudly in his hearing by her stepmother, that had, she knew, driven Lloyd Guiy out of the village and out of England. She had felt at the time that out of the village would have been quite far enough. It was rather trying of him to go right away like that, but she could

understand his character sufficiently to know that, when he began to move, he was liable to go on for ever out of sheer forgetfulness. Another grievance too was he had not written to her, although she had gone so far as to ask him on his departure, calling him, of course, Mr. Guiy, to let them all know how he got on. To be sure she had asked him in a very detached way. But she had asked.

Why had he not written? She knew well enough that men of his class did not go to an outlandish colony because they were successes at home. And sometimes she knew they strayed and went to the bad because of pride, and never wrote to anyone any more. Well, Lloyd was poor enough and proud enough. She had thought of him very often after he had left, far more often perhaps than she had done before. Retrospection had convinced her, firstly, that he had qualities which none but she could properly appreciate, and, secondly, that she had not been too kind. Not that he had asked anything of her. But there had been a gentle air of expectation about him when visiting the house which her stepmother had taken every opportunity to damp, and which she might, she knew, have fanned into something more definite. She felt vague, big regrets that she had not behaved differently. This was the sum of her conscious sentiments about him. But she made a practice of dwelling on these sentiments daily and enjoyed the sensation rather.

Later on she heard that Lloyd was tarrying on his downward path somewhere in the Malayan Archipelago. An intense longing for foreign travel visited her. She ate bananas because of the local colour, and was

frequently to be found in the palm-house at Kew. And she waited, waited hard. And, of course, everything comes to the person who waits, provided that person waits hard enough.

Very possibly her temperamental history as outlined above is much the same as that of many girls in the early twenties. One may imagine there comes a time when every one of them wants to spread her wings, giving the discomfort of the nest, the attractions outside of it or a hundred other reasons for the wish. And nowadays parents very sensibly allow them to fly.

Stepmothers have always encouraged them to do so. No obstacle was placed in Una's way when she decided to accept an engagement offered through an advertisement and go out to Sudora as governess on a rubber plantation. For one brief week she was the heroine of the village, much like an Indian widow before suttee. They decked her out for the journey at the local store, and what with the excitement and her very good looks she did the store and the village, her parents and her country credit on the way out, and made the captain of the mail steamer wish he was young again.

Then at Colombo she had received a letter from Lloyd Guiry announcing—heavens ! that he had just received an appointment on the very rubber estate she was going to. That is the worst of these stories of real life. In a romance she would never have heard of him until pirates had captured her and borne her off to Kamschatka, say ; and then Lloyd, who is absolutely unfitted for any job of the kind, would have had to have taken off his coat and tackled the business of rescuing her. Here she was just dropping into his arms like

a ripe fruit, or, as some bachelors out East would put it, like a bolt from the blue.

It had been a bolt from the blue to her, this letter at Colombo. She had experienced on reading it a feeling of irritation and shame which still clung, for she could not but reflect on what her family's verdict would be on receiving the news of this strange coincidence, on hearing that instead of her merely settling in the same continent as Lloyd, she had, in ignorance, accepted a position on his very doorstep.

She could almost hear her stepmother reading the letter aloud at breakfast and announcing an obstinate disbelief that such a meeting could ever happen except by arrangement. "You ought to have called her Diana, not Una, Mr. Hamilton. Why? Well, of course Diana was a mighty huntress; but whether Diana would have bothered about such a thing as Lloyd Guiy—— Ten thousand miles, too!" And then the shrug.

Slights, unlike objects, often seem larger when considered from a distance. Had she been at home her blushes, although deeper, would not have lasted. As it was the coincidence rankled, and although she arrived at Sudora genuinely pleased at the idea of seeing Lloyd Guiy again, she was, it must be confessed, vexed at him for daring to be there. The fact that he had not really dared but was there by accident only made matters worse. It seemed to her something like flabbiness.

But when, as the steamer drew in alongside, winches going, lines splashing in the clear green water, and she, leaning on the bulwarks beside the others, scrutinised

the group of white-clad, helmeted figures standing on the shadeless wharf and found he was not amongst it, then she knew how much really she had looked forward to seeing him again, and how glad she was to have one friend—they were nothing more than that, even unofficially—in this strange land, this land of strangers.

Whilst the steamer, drawn in broadside on by strained and dripping ropes, bumped against the wharf to the accompaniment of the shouting of a multitude of natives, she had wondered which of this group of lily-white Europeans was Lloyd Guiry; and then, seeing he was not there, which of them had come, in his place, to meet her. Was it the tall one with the blue pugaree? He looked nice enough. Or that stoutish, pimply person? She hoped not devoutly. They all of them had stared hard. No guide this, to be sure; most men and many women when they saw her looked again. She wished sometimes that nature had made her more sparrow-tinted, had given her dark hair instead of the coils of golden-brown tresses she possessed—such a fearful nuisance in hot weather—had broadened her figure, sallowed her complexion, lengthened her face. Somebody had told her once that she reminded him of Romney's "Perdita." Examining the picture afterwards she could not help admitting that there was some justice in the comparison. Her eyes were brown like Perdita's, and although taken feature by feature her face was not beautiful like that of the Regent's victim, it had Perdita's straight nose, full chin, and firm, soft lips, and it was, though she did not know this, in the habit of wearing a similar expression of kindness.

Sometimes, naturally, it lost this expression, as for instance when the gentleman of pimply complexion, whose nose she felt would not have been out of place on a rockery, had come up the steamer's gangway and approached her with an air of great determination. Her newly-assumed expression of veiled horror had given way to one of relief when he had walked straight by.

One by one the others had filed up after him, one by one they had passed her and disappeared through the same doorway with business-like briskness. Looking round she had discovered herself standing before the entrance to the steamer's bar. She had moved away. Now all the group on the wharf had vanished. Was nobody here to meet her? It was alarming! Even he of the nose, provided he came armed with proper credentials, would have been better than no one. What was she to do? She had been in the act of considering whether she ought to consult the captain as to her predicament. She had, in fact, been looking up at the bridge.

"Miss Hamilton," had said a voice beside her and she had turned. It was Mr. Baylers. She had not taken to him at first glance, and even now, when she was driving in his carriage and he was doing what she felt was his best, she liked him no better, although she wanted to. He had, so it seemed to her, a habit of trying to make mirth of other people's misfortunes strong enough to prejudice anyone. He laughed, and would have her laugh with him, at a starved looking Chinese coolie who had slipped under his load, at an elderly Eurasian (it was Mr. Fernandez) who had not

heard the approach of the carriage, and had therefore been compelled to hop aside in undignified haste.

On the other hand it was pleasant and gave one a feeling of importance to be driving, through obviously obsequious streets, in the first carriage of the country. All along the way natives were lifting their right hands in salute, and, on the wharf, on the steamer even, sufficient evidence had been given her that to be magistrate of Sudora was to be a gentleman of the utmost importance.

The purser, who had come up to her with him to make the introduction, had, in spite of himself, shown that he, the purser, was, marvellously enough, in the presence of his superior. The captain had hurried down from the bridge. Coolies under the direction of two Indians in gorgeous red uniforms had handled her somewhat shabby luggage with becoming reverence, placing it in a neatly appointed bullock-cart. The glittering carriage and pair had moved forward to the foot of the gangway down which she had descended through the sunshine, with the three Europeans, besides a number of natives, in attendance. She had at the moment a glimmering of what it was like to be a queen. They bowled through the streets, past gaudy shops, reed huts, tiny bungalows, each in its small square compound. The mellow light of sunset toned down every crude colour. The countryside had an air of welcome, so she said.

"It's a hole, an absolute hole, Miss Hamilton, as compared with Pelung," returned Baylers. "Delightful to me, of course, this afternoon though."

She read admiration in his small grey eyes. As she

had already noted to his disadvantage, these eyes had a habit of vibrating for a moment before coming to rest. They never rested long. She noted also his hand on the carriage side—a bloodless, hairy hand with an old gold signet ring on the little finger. It looked sinister, like a spider.

“We have so very few European ladies here,” he went on. “I am only a new arrival myself, but people in the service are used to being moved about, and I’m already quite settled down. I may tell you that I did not exactly bless H. E. for sending me here. But now—well, I think I’m very much to be envied.”

He finished the speech with unmistakable emphasis.

“Are there many European ladies here?” she asked hurriedly, gazing straight ahead where now was to be seen the open road, empty but for a clumsy buffalo cart. Giant mimosas interspersed with betel palms lined the green hedges and formed a canopy. The sun was getting low.

“Is it necessary to talk about them?” he asked banteringly, turning in his seat as if anxious to face her. “You will get to know them. I believe they are all very pleasant, but at the moment I’m not at all interested in them. I think, Miss Hamilton,” he proceeded in a hard, clumsy way, “without being at all conceited, you can guess the reason.”

“But I should like to know about the ladies,” she returned, flushing with annoyance. She spoke perhaps a shade acidly. She really would have valued the information. He flashed a glance at her and then looked down, smiling unpleasantly.

“I’m sure I don’t know,” he said with an equally

short inflection. "They've all been down to the Residency—I give At Homes there, don't you know. Very worthy people I thought them in the lump, but if you were to ask me about any one of them individually, well, really, I should be puzzled. Now there was Mrs.—er—what is the name of the rubber estate manager where you are going?"

"Pawker."

"Yes, that's it." He looked at her in open amusement. "Fancy my forgetting! It only shows how your presence robs me even of my memory, does it not?"

She did not reply but, her breast heaving slightly, looked away. The evening breeze blew gratefully on her flushed face. A clump of dead bamboos by the roadside rustled like paper. The shadow of a kite flitted across the white road by the side of the carriage.

"Do you believe in Fate?" he went on with elephantine playfulness.

"I believe in Mrs. Samuel Pawker," she laughed, successfully composing herself. "Dear me, fancy talking about Fate on a day like this! Tell me something interesting; your work—I should like to hear about that!"

"I don't like talking shop," he returned, looking annoyed.

"Well then, describe to me Mrs. Samuel Pawker," she said lightly. "I think you said, or were going to say, that she was at your At Home. You must remember something about her. Is she tall or short, stout or slender? Come."

"She's tall and thin, rather gaunt looking, so far

as I remember," he replied shortly. "She looks as if she has a lot of fever; I expect——"

And then he turned away suddenly, and shouted out an order to the syce. The carriage stopped beside a small dog-cart which was drawn up at the bend of the road under the bamboo hedge. A heavily built Englishman, dressed in a khaki uniform, came up, saluted, and spoke for some time in a whisper. Baylers' reply was inaudible to Una. The man saluted again and the carriage drove on.

"The local police inspector," explained Baylers in a half-sneering voice, as he settled back in his seat. "A specimen of the material they send us out to be hammered into shape."

"He looked a fine figure of a man," she ventured. The incident, slight as it was, illustrating once more the respect in which Baylers was held, duly revived her lessening awe of him. She became again pressingly conscious of an atmosphere of power and mystery. Seeing him show signs of impatience at her comment on the inspector, she said rather meekly: "I was so interested about Mrs. Pawker."

"Ah yes, that was what we were talking about," he returned with a slight start. His thoughts, she saw, had been elsewhere. "The inspector had driven her out of my head. The fact is—this is in strict confidence, Miss Hamilton—I've just had intelligence of a rather important arrest."

"Is that so? I am sorry—I mean glad."

"The effect of the news is that I shall have to put you down at the Pawkers' bungalow and hurry back," he explained with a laugh. "So I shall take it you

mean the former, though perhaps you mean the latter. I wonder ? ”

He stared straight at her, rather insolently. She lowered her eyes.

“ You have been so exceedingly kind,” she murmured awkwardly. “ I feel most grateful. What should I have done with nobody to meet me ? ”

He shrugged his shoulders slightly. “ Another five minutes,” said he, “ and you will be rid of me.”

“ But I don’t want to be ; you’ve been very kind,” she burst out. And then : “ Oh, you must come and see us, Mr. Baylers, that is if governesses are allowed to be seen in the East. You have, I’m sure you have, been very kind indeed. And I’m sure Mrs. Pawker will say so too. What is this plantation ? ” she went on hurriedly. “ Are these rubber trees ? How interesting ! I’ve never seen anything like it before.”

He had kept on looking at her fixedly and smiling faintly all through her last speech, intent apparently on noting her distress, and now he nodded.

“ Yes, Miss Hamilton, here is your home,” he said. “ The great Bitas Estate.”

Trees and hedges were now absent from the well-kept roadways. As far as the eye could reach on either side, the red clay soil, bare of all weeds, had been planted with small rubber plants. Soldiers in green, vivid and alert, they stood in regular lines, an illimitable army. Life was incarnate in every shining leaf of them. Charred and blackened tree-trunks lay thick between their ranks, the bones of the slaughtered forest.

"How interesting! How enormous!" she cried, half rising in enthusiasm.

The magistrate conceded that the place was well enough in its way, and she sank into her seat again. The carriage advanced through plantations of increasing size. *Bibits* became saplings, saplings trees. They entered a forest of smooth, grey-brown trunks, into twilight. They passed a ragged group of huts, and Una received an impression of dingy black folk living with mangy yellow dogs and fowls in a state of intense untidiness. Then came a large open space, in the middle of which stood the bungalow.

"Well, encouragement or not, Miss Hamilton," said Baylers as they drew up, "I insist on being allowed to come and call at the very first opportunity."

She was as warm as need be in her reply, and in her seconding later of Mrs. Samuel Pawker's hospitable urging.

They seemed a very likeable couple, did her new employers, in spite of the lady's absurd round face and equally absurd get-up. And she felt even after one minute's acquaintance that they were going to like her. It was comical to see the fuss they made of the somewhat supercilious Mr. Baylers: to observe Mr. Pawker, a short, puffy gentleman with blue eyes, a sandy moustache, and a head from which the worries of management had already shorn the hair, hover round the carriage plaintively insisting on the quality of the Bitas Estate whisky, to notice his good lady, when once their distinguished visitor had been persuaded on to the veranda, take his solar topee and almost bow him into the best long chair.

"You must stay to dinner now we have got you, Mr. Baylers."

He couldn't possibly. Some other evening. He explained the reason.

"Oh, bother!" cried Mrs. Pawker, standing over against him, a horribly thin figure in home-made yellow, one anxious eye at his service, the other intent on the deportment of the white-clad Chinese "boy" whose duty it was to serve the whisky-soda. "Bother," she cried, waving her fan. "Let it wait till to-morrow." But as he continued to shake his head she went on, Una thought with relief, to remarks on his kindness in looking so well after their new arrival.

"I suppose you left the young fellow I sent down to meet you to come on with your luggage, Miss Hamilton?" inquired Samuel Pawker, who had taken unto himself a whisky-soda, and was now also seated.

"Was there anyone to meet me, then?"

"Was there? Why, of course there was!" cried Mrs. Pawker. "Didn't you see him? Then he must have missed you. There!" She gave her husband a look that spoke volumes.

"We sent a young fellow named Lloyd Guiy down," said that gentleman, seriously enough. "He was very keen to go. He told me he knew you."

"He promised to meet me; he wrote to Colombo," said Una, speaking quietly; she felt herself growing red. "He is an old friend—I mean, that is—a family friend."

"What name did you say?" asked Baylers, looking at her keenly.

"Lloyd Guiy, one of our new assistants," replied Samuel Pawker.

"Then I'm sorry to tell you, Mr. Pawker," said Baylers in a hard voice, getting up, "that this new assistant is in trouble. The inspector informs me that a person of that name has been taken into custody for gambling in a gambling den."

"Gambling!" cried Una. "Lloyd Guiy! Oh, Mr. Baylers!"

He stared at her for a moment. "I will do what I can for your friend," he said. "Goodnight."

And catching up his topee, he turned abruptly and left the veranda. A moment later she heard the carriage drive away.

CHAPTER VII

“IF this Mr. Guiy was not a friend of yours,” said Mrs. Pawker when a little later she led Una off to the “children’s” bedroom, “I should have said a very great deal more than I have done. Gambling in a gambling den! It’s most impolite, to say the least.”

“Perhaps there is some mistake,” said Una tentatively.

After her outcry she had regained control of herself and had listened, her lips compressed, her limbs rigid, to Mr. Pawker’s cheerful remarks on the difficulty of finding reliable European assistants. He had been considerate in not mentioning any names.

“If these young men would only work and not bother so much about their so-called pleasures,” he had grumbled as he sat at the round veranda table and looked at her. “This is the ruin of so many out East, Miss Hamilton,” he had gone on, holding up the glass in his hand. “Well, well, I do my best to keep them straight; but when we have them going so far that the police have to interfere, well——” He had not finished the speech but had shaken his bald head slowly instead, and she had looked at him with equal gravity, impressed, disturbed, and rather miserable. A wretched end to a day that had promised well.

The bungalow, with its roughly-planked, lime-washed walls, its dim, evil-smelling oil lamps around which flies and winged ants circled, its general air of raw cheapness, already depressed her. The place seemed to have been built with a chopper. On the doors and window frames were tacked curtains of red German cotton, obviously bought in the bazaar. Mr. Pawker was not too well shaved, and wore loose slippers. His stale white suit, unbuttoned at the neck, showed at least three inches of sun-reddened chest. He had said, very kindly, that he hoped she would feel at home with them.

"Well, they are kind, at any rate, these two," she thought as on tiptoe she followed Mrs. Pawker into the room.

A bedroom lamp standing on a table near the wall shed a faint light. In the farther corner was a cot, heavily draped in white mosquito netting. An elderly native woman, very barely clad, arose at their entrance from a sleeping mat on the floor, and approached noiselessly.

"*Dia suda tidor*," she murmured with a respectful grin.

"She's asleep," translated Mrs. Pawker, looking very tender and motherly in spite of that horrible evening gown and her absurd, dark, sallow face. She plucked at Una's arm and, turning, led the way out, and along another passage. "I've put you in the spare room for to-night," she remarked in a louder voice, opening another canvas half-door. "There is your trunk, and you will find everything in the way of towels, etcetera. Don't trouble to dress for dinner

to-night if you feel too tired. I always dress every night myself: one never knows who may come in unexpected, like the magistrate to-night. Wasn't it lucky I was dressed? "

Una said it was, and the good lady, after hinting defensively that she did not altogether approve of Mr. Samuel Pawker's ideas on the subject of costume at the evening meal, retired rustling.

What a comical room! What a comical, crazy, rickety, nightmare of a bungalow! And then dinner.

The bungalow possessed a separate dining-room, a dining-room the rough plank walls of which were stained a reddish brown, giving the place a baronial air, according to Mr. Pawker. A sideboard, lined with bottles of hospitable shape and colour, and dazzling with serried rows of glass, flanked the dining-table. Hiding the entrance from the back premises there stood a screen, the cloth of which was of a rather more brilliant green than the floor matting. Una noticed a hole in this screen. Until she noticed that hole and saw an eye behind it she had been puzzled at the Chinese servant's promptitude. Now she knew how it was that the laying down on the plate of the last fork or spoon drew him from his lair as with cords, how it was that no sooner had she finished the thin, kidney-flavoured chicken soup than the dried fish was before her, and so with the roasted, but not subdued, fowl, the buffalo masquerading as beef, the *gula Malacca*, the sliced and turnip-like pineapple.

Her host insisted on her trying the pineapple with salt, saying that the mixture was good for the digestion. From other remarks the couple let drop she gathered

that feeding and the after results was a principal topic with them. Mr. Pawker, so he told her pathetically, had suffered from "gastroitis." He asked her, with a humorous expression of interest very visible in his pale blue eyes, if her stomach was a strong one; and seemed, she thought, at once relieved and disappointed at the good news she was able to give him. "He is determined to know me well," she said to herself with a smile.

And whilst he was busying himself with inquiries about one part of her anatomy the mosquitoes in the dark below the table were busy with another. How her ankles itched! She longed, longed terribly, to pull off her stockings and have a good scratch, and yet, uncomfortably hot, and rubbing foot and ankle furtively against each other, she sat on the stifling veranda for at least an hour after dinner while the dyspeptics consumed coffee and liqueurs, and asked her all sorts of questions about herself and the trip out. It was a joy when the cuckoo—home, Samuel Pawker had already told her, was not home to him without a cuckoo clock—announced the hour of ten.

Her bedroom was cooler. She flung the shutters open to the night and the breeze stole in, fanning her. And she crept under the soft waving tent of mosquito netting on to the broad coverless bed and fell quickly asleep.

When she awoke her eyes opened to blue sky and a flood of light. In through the windows poured the morning. She could hear two natives laughing and chattering in their soft language somewhere outside. And there was a furious clucking of hens coming from

beneath the floor, which was rather puzzling until she remembered that the bungalow stood on stout posts at least six feet above the ground. The hands of her watch marked seven o'clock. Half an hour later the sun in person appeared round the corner of the bungalow and shone direct on to the bed, making her rise. And with it came Mrs. Pawker in curlers and a kimono, bringing her little girl.

Then breakfast held in the baronial dining-room, breakfast with the already perspiring Samuel opposite, a Samuel clad in khaki and eager for the day's fray, champing his food like a war horse.

The little girl, her new pupil, had breakfast with them. She was a shy, delicate looking child, dark and sallow like her mother, and, so Una thought, did not seem at all spoilt. "Sallie junior" her father called her, with a twinkle in his dyspeptic blue eye. Here, plain to be seen, was a fond parent. "She's called after her mother, ain't you, Sallie?" and perhaps because Una's manner showed interest and sympathy he added: "Yes, Miss Hamilton, Sallie and Samuel, that's what we are to all our friends at home, and I hope we shall be to you before we've done."

"You are very kind," returned Una, saying exactly what she thought. She let loose a smile.

The dyspeptic withdrew the spoon from his third egg, waved it playfully at her and winked, a confidential wink including in its compass Mrs. Pawker and Sallie junior. Una felt that he had conferred on her the freedom of the bungalow.

"May I call you Oona?" piped the little girl, looking at her wistfully from the other side of the table.

"Why, of course you may, Sallie junior," cried Una. "And how did you know my name then? How did she find it out?" she asked, turning to the mother.

"She's been saying nothing but 'Oona,' 'Oona,' for the last fortnight. She learnt it from your letter," returned Mrs. Pawker, with a laugh. "I've tried to make her say 'Una,' but she won't, the naughty girl. She always pronounces it 'Oona.' Samuel here says it's because there's no 'u' in Malay."

"It's a pretty name, whichever way you pronounce it," remarked the dyspeptic Samuel, who had finished the third egg and was now rolling up his table-napkin preparatory to departure. "And so's Sallie, too."

"Very," agreed Una hastily.

"'Of all the girls that are so sma-art, There's none like pretty Sa-Sa-Sallie,'" carolled the dyspeptic in a high throaty tenor, rolling his eyes fearfully.

"Oh, Sam, go on," giggled Mrs. Pawker, her face alive with pleasure. "Get away to your work, do."

"'She is the dar-har-ling of my hear-r-rt, And lives in our bungalow.'" He twinkled on to the veranda and came back, topee in hand. "Hang it! Miss Hamilton, mayn't we all call you Una?"

"Do, by all means," said Una, smiling.

"Right-ho!" He made her a grotesque bow; another bow to his wife. "'Of all the girls that are so smar-r-rt.'" In full song he turned and left the dining-room. They heard him rattle down the veranda steps.

“There he goes,” remarked Mrs. Pawker, her face one large smile, her little button of a nose vibrating with happiness. She was silent for a moment and then, her face glooming, she added: “But he has his trouble to face, Miss Hamilton. One egg too many inside him this morning, I am sure, and within the next half-hour he’ll be sorry he ate it. When he gets excited he loses his head and just eats anything, the stupid man!”

She told Una much more about him; what struggles he had experienced in getting a foot on the ladder. How he had selected her from out of a galaxy to be his mate. How that since she had been behind him he had never looked back. Information concerning her wedding dress—she had it still with her and would show it to Una one day—brought conversation to other subjects. Later on there were the little girl’s things to be exhibited and handed over to Una’s care.

The three of them tiffined together, Mr. Pawker having driven over to a distant part of the estate. He was very often away for tiffin.

And as this morning passed so did the next and the next again. None of the womenfolk stirred out as a rule until after tea, when the sun had begun to loosen grip and breezes refreshed the tired trees. Often they had tea brought to them as they sat on a patch of lawn in the shade.

The bungalow stood on a bare clearing amidst the oldest rubber on the estate. The scene had about it something of the painful rawness which one associates with new suburbs and jerry builders. Nature defaced has her own methods of revenge. In spite of Samuel

Pawker's coaxing she had refused to make a garden of this clearing, and the durian, mangosteen, mango, lime, and other trees planted about the house were still small and looked sickly. All was fenced about with thickets of rubber trees, impenetrable to the eye. The brazen sun shone on a myriad grey trunks visible against the blackness beyond, a grizzly army encompassing the bungalow. Green tops of trees framed the hard blue heavens. Trees shut out the world. There was no running water near the place, only ditches covered with scum, the breeding ground of mosquitoes.

Close to the edge of the plantation were working a party of blue-clad Chinese coolies, curious looking creatures with rolled pigtails just visible beneath their conical, white-painted sun hats. Their constant trotting to and fro, with baskets of yellow earth suspended on the bent carrying poles which rested on the shoulders of each pair of them, the half-inhuman sound of their voices coming faintly over the bare clearing, a sound, even when softened by distance, instinct with energy, all this caught Una's attention often during the next few days. She wondered how it was men could bring themselves to work so hard under that scorching sun. Noticing Mr. Pawker stop to watch them on his way in to tiffin she questioned him. And by doing so she obtained information on another subject about which she had, whether from pride or from other reasons, forborne enquiry.

"Oh, the drain we're cutting, Miss Una," had returned Mr. Samuel Pawker, stopping in his endeavour to amuse Sallie junior by trying to throw his topee on

to its peg from a distance of twelve feet. "Why do those coolie boys work so hard? Because they're making their fortunes. And if I didn't look at them they'd make their fortunes, or the contractors would, without digging the drain at all. Our friend, Mr. Lloyd Guiy, was to have had the supervision of that work," he went on, looking at her quizzically, "but I've sent him out of harm's way up to the new clearing. So I'm afraid you won't see him for a few days yet. What do we do with bad boys, eh, Sallie junior?"

"Put dem in de corner," shouted the child enthusiastically, rushing up to the dyspeptic and shoving with vigour.

"Hey, hey, but I'm not a bad boy!"

"I wondered once or twice why he had not come to see us," said Una, looking as unconscious as she could.

The dyspeptic picked up his topee and began again: "Once—twice—three times—four times——"

The intense expression of knowingness visible on his face was very annoying. But one cannot voice annoyance merely because a person looks knowing. At tiffin she noted unsympathetically the biliousness visible in his eye.

She had begun to give Sallie junior lessons now. When these were over for the day the two of them hand in hand would walk slowly about the clearing. Rain had not fallen for some time. The lumps of red earth, lying everywhere thick as pebbles, crumbled like sand under foot. The leaves of the shrubs were brittle to the touch, and had turned a sickly yellow.

At the place where the new drain was being dug, dust obscured the air and lay thick on the broad leaves of the rubber trees. She felt that perhaps she ought not to take Sallie junior near this work, but curiosity eventually overcame the feeling. Hand in hand they stood on an earth-stained plank at the side of an enormous ditch, and watched the coolies dig the drain. The grim, soulless faces of these people appalled her. Most of them had bared to the buff. Their muscles showed like knotted cords, clear as if cut in brown marble. They scarcely vouchsafed her a glance, but went on with their work, grunting like animals, steaming with sweat, fascinating to look on. She forgot all about Sallie junior until the child screamed suddenly.

"*Lilipan ! lilipan !* it will bite you !" screamed Sallie junior, pointing in terror, and Una, looking down, saw in a rush of disgust a many-legged, fearsome, black thing, about six inches long, running up her white skirt. It was running quickly in a wavering line. It dodged the blow she aimed at it with her parasol, and, like a streak, ran round to her back. And then, trying feebly still to brush the horror off, she screamed.

There was a quick rush of feet over the crumbling earth, something scraped against her and then dropped to the ground. She was whirled aside.

"It is all right, madam, at your service," a voice said, and, turning, she beheld a very dark young man in a white suit pick up his immaculate solar topee, shake it, and then proceed to dance like a madman on something still wriggling close by.

"Would you, would you, would you? Great Scott and Dickens!" hissed the young man with intense ferocity. He stopped the dance, dug his heels into the ground for the last time, and approached her.

"There is no more danger: I have finished the blighter," he announced. With a ringed hand he swept back the oily love curls from his eyes.

"A thousand thanks," Una panted. "What a dreadful thing! What a dreadful thing! What is it?"

"It was a mere incident," the young man told her. "We have many of them running about. They frequent us when we are in the bathroom in a state of innuendo, much to our general disgust."

He transferred his topee to the other hand and began nervously to dust it with a red silk pocket-handkerchief.

"Excuse mentioning the bathroom to a stranger," he added. "My tongue slipped over my absent-mindedness due to present romanticness of thee—thee——"

He stuttered. Was he mad, or merely polite? Plainly he was labouring under great excitement. The small chest, heaving under the moist white suit, the dilated nostril, the rolling eye, told her that. Now he was dusting his topee, revolving it quickly in his thin yellow hands. Now, with a stealthy upward glint of this extraordinary young man's eye, the revolution ceased. Inside the brim, plain to be read, was printed: "PERISH THE BLIGHTER WHO BONES THIS HAT. Signed, FERDINAND FERNANDEZ. GOVT. CONTRACTOR. THE GROTT. SUDORA."

Instinctively she turned away, delicate about taking

advantage of an involuntary revelation of identity, but the hat, moving, remained within her field of vision. Its busy owner was holding it at arm's length, as one does a concertina. Never for an instant did he cease dusting the brim. Could it be possible that he desired the inscription on the brim to be read? She looked again. The dark, perspiring face underneath the bobbing curls seemed to her by no means free from self-consciousness. That uneasy grin, or rather faint smile, could but mean—— “Mr.—Mr. Fernandez?” she began tentatively.

“I had forgotten my card case,” he broke in like a torrent. “A case of extreme mental aberration, unfortunately. I had carried this card case about with me since early childhood, never using, owing to my habit contracted of living in jungly parts. Transferring myself to clean clothes this morning before coming here, in my excitement forgot also to transfer this card case, which has now doubtless perished in the hands of the washerman.”

“It doesn't matter,” said Una, smiling her kindest. “At least I know whom to thank.”

He silenced her with a gesture, a gesture resembling one of the exercises of the physical culturists. His eyes stopped rolling for an instant in order to flash. She understood him to say that he desired nothing better than to spend his life in brushing centipedes from the hem of her garment. His tone was that of a Saint George, it seemed to her, and showed plainly that he thought of the hem of her garment, not as a part of her person, but rather as a suitable field for combats between him and innumerable centipedes.

"Was it a centipede?" she asked, not knowing exactly what to make of him.

"Oah yess. Didn't you know, miss? You have not been in this place long. Just out from London, miss?"

"I'm awfully grateful." She drew herself together, preparing to depart. "I suppose we shall meet each other again? This is such a small place. Well, good-bye, Mr. Fernandez." She held out her hand.

"Oh, miss!" he gasped, looking at the hand as if he could not believe his eyes. But he took it and shook it as vigorously as he had dusted his hat. "You shower me with your blessings. I should like to shake hands all day. I declare I'm all topsy-turvy! I thought, after the usual custom, you would have brought at once our involuntary acquaintance to a foregone conclusion."

"Why, what makes you think that?" she cried, drawing her hand away as he showed no signs of ceasing to shake it. And then, in spite of herself, she burst into a peal of laughter. "Oh, excuse me," she gasped, "but why do you say a foregone conclusion?"

"Out here 'mems' are not friends with me. They are too proud," he explained.

"But not me. I'm not proud. I am friends with every one. Especially with brave people who rescue me from centipedes. We shall meet many times."

"We shall?" he cried eagerly. His face still showed unbelief. "I don't unnerstan'. If we were in the Strand, London, I could unnerstan'. But here in Sudora! Oah, why did I forget my card case? I

have one, I assure you. The hat brim ! Pardon the rudeness of a mere laughstock."

Withdrawing a little, she gave him a smiling nod. He hurriedly clapped on his topee, only to take it off with a flourish. And as, in her retreat to the bungalow, she looked back from time to time, she saw him, a lonely figure on a mound of red earth against the grey trunks of the rubber trees, strenuously engaged in clapping on his topee and taking it off with a flourish.

CHAPTER VIII

UNA told them at dinner about her adventure. She had begun already to suspect that the centipede, in spite of its horns and tail, was not so nearly akin to the devil as might appear to the new-comer. A remark made by Samuel confirmed her suspicions. Old stagers like himself, he told her, making a face, thought nothing of finding a centipede in one of their sandwiches when picnicking.

"Disgusting," cried Mrs. Pawker, laying down her knife and fork.

"Sometimes I think Sallie puts them in for spite," laughed Samuel. "She's told me more than once, Miss Una, that what I want for my gastroitis is a good stir up. Me, with civil war going on in me inside every day of the week, and 1812, bells and all, regular after Sunday's dinner! Nobody knows better than I do what a terrible time the French must have had."

"You won't get much sympathy if you are so cheerful," laughed Una, in acknowledgment of his wink, which, as she had come to know, was merely his method of smiling when his mouth was busy.

"You were lucky to have had that young Eurasian, what's-his-name, to kill it," remarked Mrs. Pawker. "Don't take any notice of Samuel. I'm sure it was dreadful."

"Nobody ever does take any notice of me except

the coolies on pay day," wailed the dyspeptic, extracting an imaginary tear between thumb and forefinger and dashing it on to his plate.

"Samuel!" cried Mrs. Pawker.

He shook his toothpick at her playfully.

But although the dyspeptic might have been slack in private life he was quite capable on occasion of doing the bungalow credit. When Mrs. Pawker gave a dinner to introduce Una to the estate staff no male of the party was more resplendent than he. True, he took two hours to dress, and insisted on the whole bungalow being shaken in order to find a dropped collar stud. But the result was worthy of the effort.

Una watched him pacing the veranda stiffly before the first guest came, obviously conscious of the fact that his every hair was numbered. And, as the evening wore on, she had the pleasure of observing his joints work looser. It was not she, of course, nor the members of the staff—healthy looking young men from public schools—who were the cause of Samuel's perturbation. The magistrate, Una found, was to be the feather in his cap. It was for the magistrate, not for her, although she was the official guest of the evening, that Mrs. Pawker had donned her purple and old gold, cut high. Her husband's low tastes, it appeared, stopped at his wife's bodices.

She and Una sat side by side waiting for the sound of the great man's carriage wheels, while the men smoked cigarettes taken from round tins, and mixed themselves gin *pahits* at a side table, and talked convulsively. At last he entered, saluted by a scraping of

chair-legs over the polished veranda floor as everybody arose.

"Why, he has on a white suit, I declare," said Mrs. Pawker to Una, in a hurt whisper.

But no, when he turned towards them, something in the shape of gold braid was visible about his drill collar, and, actually, there was a dress sword dangling at his side.

During the dinner Una heard, as did everybody else, Mrs. Pawker questioning him about the sword, heard his amused and faintly condescending replies. She herself, thanks to a tongue-tied youth on her right, and the still-vexed Samuel on her left, had ample leisure for observation.

The dinner remained in her memory as the type of many others. Lamps flickered with the waning and waxing of the breeze ; there was the ceaseless running to and fro of the lily-white Chinese "boys," immaculate from the crown of their shining, half-shaven pigtailed heads to the thick felt soles of their embroidered shoes. The smell of burning paraffin struggled with the calm scents that came in through open shutters from the jungle. And the European dishes were an unashamed pretence, as they must always be out East.

But the hostess had decorated the table in the afternoon with alamanda flowers, yellow trumpeters of festival that blended with her dress. And she had spared no pains to make her entertainment a success. Champagne was produced, the froth, so Samuel remarked, of the rubber boom. The company drank to the health of the guest of the evening. When she withdrew to the veranda afterwards in the wake

of Mrs. Pawker she was still flushing uncomfortably at the personal note that the magistrate had managed to introduce into his speech concerning her. "Miss Hamilton and I, although she does not know it, come from the same county," was one of his remarks. Certainly she had not known it. He had the air of exhibiting one of his possessions, so it seemed to her. Later on in the evening, although she tried to avoid him, he succeeded in cornering her, driving off the youth to whom she was talking with the greatest ease. Indeed there was no driving off. At the approach of the mighty magistrate round the corner of the veranda the youth, muttering something unintelligible, beat a retreat.

Baylers sat down uninvited beside her, saying he was sorry he had not been able to come and talk with her before. She had been more or less openly avoiding him all the evening ; and she knew that he knew it.

"You are very much more in demand than I am," she said, allowing herself a tinge of sarcasm.

"The secret of that is not to make oneself too cheap, Miss Hamilton," he said, quietly insolent.

She hesitated in her reply. "After all," she reflected, "of what use to get at outs with this man ? "

"Everything is new to me," she murmured.

"To some people you will never be cheap ; to me, for instance," he went on, crudely as a Juggernaut. From the smile on his thick lips it was plain that he thought this compliment rather neat. She looked wooden, intentionally.

"To me you will always be——" he began again in amplification, but she stared at him so hardily that he stumbled, ending by muttering something about detrimental young rubber-planters—girls cannot be too careful—a warning from one who knew the East. He had reddened slightly and the glimpse she caught of his eyes had the effect of damping the elation she was already beginning to feel at his easy discomfiture. The sense of uneasiness, almost of danger, that his presence, strangely enough, occasioned in her always, began to increase. Nevertheless she laughed gaily.

"I rather like the race of young rubber-planters, from what I have seen of them," she said.

"Such as Mr. Lloyd Guiy," sneered he, without the slightest sign of hesitation.

"Such as Mr. Lloyd Guiy," she affirmed bravely, looking straight ahead of her over the white veranda railing into the darkness. He did not reply at once. She was acutely conscious of him sitting there at her side, his narrow head bent towards the ground, his ever restless eyes shooting now and then a glance at her.

"I am very glad to have been of service to one you are so—er—fond of," he said at length with an accent on the final adjective.

"Did you help Mr. Guiy, then? You mean regarding the misunderstanding about the gambling?"

"I do," he returned, openly irritated. "'Misunderstanding about' is an excellent way of putting it. I should call it 'conviction for' myself." He turned, and with an obvious intention of reading how the

information would affect her, fixed his eyes on her face. "I could have sent him to prison," he said in a distinct voice.

In spite of herself a look of alarm spread over her face. "To prison!" she exclaimed, surprised. "I had no idea——"

"Don't be agitated. It's all right."

"I'm not agitated at all."

"He's been getting into bad company: all these young planters do," he said contemptuously. "Gambling in these low hotels! It must be put down. But I bound him over to come up for judgment if called on, and so long as he behaves himself I shall not be hard on him."

"Then you can still—you still have the power to put him in prison?" she asked in agitation.

"Oh yes. But there's no fear. I regret you feel so disturbed about him. Europeans ought not to mix themselves up with these low half-castes. It's degrading."

"His family and ours are the greatest friends," Una explained, feeling discomposed. "I've known Mr. Guiy all my life. I'm sure—I'm sure he would not wish to do anything disgraceful. I should be dreadfully sorry if anything happened to him."

"You and I must look after him then," suggested Baylers. "There's no need to let the thing upset you. I won't go so far as to guarantee his salvation, but, as the magistrate, well, you know——" he finished the sentence with a look.

"I am so grateful, Mr. Baylers," cried Una, trying hard to express her thanks

"And yet you don't like me," he went on after a moment's silence, with a crooked smile.

"I—" she faltered. "Oh, how can you say that!"

"Well then, say that you don't mind me coming out here to see you sometimes." And when she, with an effort to strike an impersonal note, had done so, he added: "I thought, excuse me, that Mr. Lloyd Guiy was perhaps something—er—more than a brother?"

"Oh no," Una muttered, with a sense of disloyalty. And for making her feel thus she disliked the man before her more than ever.

Ping, ping went the mosquitoes round the bed that night, calling like steel bugles in Lilliput as they vainly strove to effect an entrance through the netting. She lay in the hot darkness tossing from side to side in an effort after slumber, and worrying about the degraded frequenter of gambling dens, who had—this was the last straw—never even troubled to write apologising for having failed to meet the steamer; a person, in short, to be dismissed for ever.

But the mornings at the bungalow, no matter what the nights had been, were always pleasant, invitations to live, leaving memories of flashing sunlight, of cool luscious fruit, of cackling fowls, of the joyous dyspeptic singing in his bathroom as he purified himself for the sacred task of bearing the burden and heat of the day.

In the afternoon she walked out again hand-in-hand with Sallie junior. As had been her custom since the adventure of the centipede, she was careful to avoid a further encounter with the strange young Eurasian, Mrs. Pawker having explained to her that such people were not exactly to be encouraged. She often caught

a glimpse of him in the distance standing on his mound beside the workers. He must have noticed her, for on two or three occasions he raised his topee with great emphasis ; but she always drew hurriedly out of sight, feeling that this was what Mrs. Pawker would have wished, but still rather ashamed.

CHAPTER IX

MR. and Mrs. Fernandez could not but remark Ferdinand's elated looks when he returned to the Grotto after his adventure. His news amazed them. It was a wonderful tale, truly; even from the lips of such a narrator they could scarcely credit it.

"A centipede twelve inches long!" Mrs. Fernandez exclaimed, after the elated narrator had gone to bed.

"He says so," returned her husband. "We always hear that when one goes afar into the forest one meets with strange creatures."

"Who would have dreamt of such an animal?" Mrs. Fernandez cried. "And to attack it! And what a missie! He seems already to love her! Anything so long as the face is pretty: so it is with the men. Old friends' feet are to be wiped on. Pah! I am sorry now you sent him on this work. And he says he might have kissed her hand if he had chosen, and she already calls him her old friend Ferdinand. Such a forward! No good will come of her liking for the boy. He is like a frog, can't you see, already bursting with importance. You heard his demand for clean socks for to-morrow! His head is turned! I am— Take him away and appoint yourself to this contract of drain digging," she had ended fiercely.

"I will," agreed her husband, excited too, it seemed.

But next morning he had gone down to the office without making any alteration. And she and Amy were full of other matters, it being washing day. So Ferdinand continued with the work in the meantime, work which, after all, was unsuited for the supervision of an old man like Mr. Fernandez. Later on it began to grow plain that in spite of brilliant socks showing below the turned-up trousers of his immaculate white suit, in spite of polished teeth and hair scented strongly enough to attract every female in the country, Ferdinand's luck with this new lady had not lasted. Either the bait was not sufficiently attractive, or, as he suggested, the lady's master and mistress had surprised her secret and forcibly kept her from his company.

Whatever the cause, a breakdown plainly had occurred in the regions of romance. Evening after evening the old couple listened, with chastened features but rejoicing inwardly, to Ferdinand's tale of melancholy long drawn out, or rather dexterously extracted by Mrs. Fernandez. They sympathised with him in his description of himself sitting on his disused ant-hill over against the new drain, waiting, waiting, come rain, come sun, hoping against hope. With what eagerness at first had he watched every window, every veranda of the distant bungalow! He had seen her figure more than once, but at a wave of his hat it had disappeared; but still he watched and would continue watching.

Later on yet, he told them that he found the continual watching straining to the eyes, and that he wished, if possible, to be advanced by the Fernandez

firm the small sum of ten dollars to be considered as a loan and applied towards the purchase of a tourist's telescope. By means of this telescope he would be enabled, so he said, to detect the slightest movement, such as the fluttering of a handkerchief from a bedroom window, and fly at once to the rescue.

The fact that the old couple were against such a purchase might have aroused his suspicions. He put down their refusal to simple meanness, and tried again to open their pockets by stirring up their souls, unconscious of the fact that he was stirring the wrong way. But still they shook their heads, Amy looking meanwhile at her plate with troubled eyes.

"It can't be done," said the old man.

"No, no, father, he mustn't be allowed to go teasing young ladies with his telescopes," cried Mrs. Fernandez.

"But I want a telescope," said Ferdinand sulkily.

"You'll never get it in this house then," said the old lady shortly. "What you young whipper-snappers are coming to! No decent, manly young man asked for such things when I was young, did they, Mr. Fernandez?"

"Certainly not," averred the old man. "Love was blind in my day. I had no telescope when I married your mother, Amy. I wasn't watching her habits. Perhaps if I had——"

"Well, and what if you had?" interrupted Mrs. Fernandez coldly. There was an uncomfortable silence. The old man coughed.

"But think, think, all of you," cried Ferdinand eloquently, waving both arms in appeal. "She may

be confined to her bedroom, tied up by hard-hearted employers to the bedpost. She may be degraded and insolented merely because she has expressed a pining to come and see me, to see how I look after my violent exercises."

"She has seen you once," pointed out the old man. "Why should she want to see you again?"

"Of course, to see how I am, to see that my health is going strong," urged Ferdinand eagerly. He rolled his eyes from one to the other, his face as miserable as a barometer on bank holiday. "I'm her rescuer and she must want to see her rescuer. Don't you understand? Great Scott and Dickens! Then I will show you in black and white."

He jumped up from the table and ran to his bedroom, coming back a moment afterwards with a yellow-covered novelette in his hand.

"Here!" he cried triumphantly. "I will read you: 'The Lady Ermyntrode descended the broad marble stairway of the palace and wandered forth amid green lawns to her rose gardens. There she perceived a well-known figure watering a rose tree with averted face. Busily engaged he feigned ignorance of her sweet propinquity and she, advancing on wings over the shaven turf, strove to still her panting bosom. He turned. Her surmise was correct, and her heart leaped within her. "My bold rescuer," she cried. "The joy is too much for me." And then giving a great gasp she fainted in his outstretched arms.' Finished!" He again looked triumphant. "You see, father, that is how the female nobility of London treat their rescuers. Look at this paper, a London paper situated

in a very good locality, Fleet Street, which, so they tell me, is on the way to Willie's, the well-known house of calling for refreshments."

"Well, well," wavered the old man, apparently impressed. "We must see——"

"He shan't have it," snapped Mrs. Fernandez. "Such an idea! Sitting on an ant-hill watching through a telescope a young lady tied to a bedpost! No gallant young man would do such things. What next!"

"But, mother," explained Ferdinand with an ingratiating wave of the hand. "I don't want to watch her."

"Well, what do you want then?"

"I want to watch so that when she waves her handkerchief," he began in a stumbling way, "and wants rescuing again I—I——"

"I don't believe you know what you want," cried the old lady indignantly. "You're just getting too irritating. You're wearing my head bald with worrying after you. And as for your father, or what must bear the brunt of being your father, Mr. Fernandez, here——"

"What, you would remind me of my wretched birth!" cried Ferdinand, beside himself.

A loud sobbing interrupted him, and Amy, catching up her plate, rose and hurriedly left the room.

"There, that's what comes of your telescope!" cried Mrs. Fernandez, her wide bosom heaving.

"I didn't know she would be so sorry for me," muttered Ferdinand shamefacedly.

"Sorry for you!" screamed the old lady, shaking

her fist. "How do you dare? My daughter sorry for you? She's sorry for herself."

"And so am I for myself," Ferdinand hastily said, rising from the table and looking scared enough at the storm he had raised. "I didn't unnerstan'." He retreated backwards. "I must be hopping now," he muttered with a pitiful assumption of being at his ease, and vanished.

The old lady gazed fixedly at the empty doorway, the hard, angry look on her countenance melting gradually into an expression of concern and melancholy.

"Hopping!" she uttered at last. "Hopping!"

"That was what he said," returned the old man uncertainly. "I expect he means going to his work."

"We called him Bird-in-Hand. Is he in hand now?"

"He is not," conceded Mr. Fernandez.

"No, hopping always, hopping away from the nest in search either of strange drinks or the strange woman, woe betide our unhappy lot," went on Mrs. Fernandez in melancholy tones. "After this hour I shall think of him not as Bird-in-Hand, but as Hopping-bird—hopping, hopping away."

"Perhaps if we are kind he will hop back," suggested her husband comfortingly.

"I should like to weep," she went on, taking no notice of the interruption. "But I should much better like to make him weep, using your slipper, Mr. Fernandez. It would remind him of old times. To think of the way we've clothed and nourished him. Why, I was feeding him up to be Amy's husband!"

"I know you were," assented the old man. "Perhaps

you've overdone it. Perhaps it's your overfeeding that makes him so proud and high-spirited. I didn't tell you before, but even before this missie came I was beginning to fidget about that Mrs. Roga at the hotel."

"What, her!" cried the old lady scornfully. "She could be his mother. She's as fat too as I am."

"He may like her because she's like you," pointed out the old man. Plainly it was a new idea to him. He looked at Mrs. Fernandez, who began to smile. "He's a puzzler," he admitted. Then after a short silence, during which his face showed plainly that he was thinking hard, he smiled too and said: "Listen! This is a plan. You give him too much food. He becomes conceited. Give him little food. He will hop back to us!"

They must have discussed the matter further, for next day the Grotto seemed to have become more like a hermitage, as regards the breakfast menu, at any rate.

"Where are my two eggs, mother?" demanded Ferdinand truculently.

"The hens didn't lay any. I expect they are upset about your businesses like all of us," said the old lady, looking at him hard over the tea-pot.

Mr. Fernandez rubbed his hands together, coughing uncomfortably.

"I expect they've been shedding tears all night," she went on. "They can't lay eggs when they're busy shedding tears, can they?"

"The blighters!" muttered Ferdinand, looking uneasily around.

"I'm sending down a little lime for them to-day," remarked Mr. Fernandez in a hesitating manner.

"They've not been looking so well lately; I've noticed it." He gave his wife a warning nod. She must have taken the hint, for her next remarks were much more conciliatory. She conceded that want of lime might account for the hens' omissions. She agreed that a hen with an egg to lay and no shell to put it in might naturally feel aggrieved. But Ferdinand, looking up from the simple pulses on his plate, caught the two old people smiling understandingly at each other, and the expression that forthwith spread over his face proclaimed that he vaguely suspected some plot or other against him.

"But he shall have his two eggs soon again, Mrs. Fernandez," went on the father.

"Oah yess," replied Mrs. Fernandez sweetly.

"I don't believe—" began Ferdinand in anger, and then ended, smiling cynically, "that we shall have rain to-day."

He rose from the table, his breakfast tasted but practically untouched, and, mounting his bicycle, rode away in a fury. Friends on the road seemed enemies that morning. He probably would have charged into them and knocked them spinning without the slightest compunction had they not leapt into the hedges at his approach, gazing open-mouthed after him as he fled along like one possessed.

Clouds of dust enveloped him. The sun rose high and beat upon his neck. He saw red that morning, there's not a doubt of it. But the ride among palms, along green lanes, through that hot-house countryside, brought enervation. He looked weary when, after he had reached the estate, he lay on a small mat in shadow

of the rubber trees at the edge of the plantation where his coolies were digging the drain.

A Chinaman, the foreman of the gang, brought him a young coco-nut ; anon, bare to the singlet, he squatted upright like a squirrel and slaked his thirst, his face completely buried in the green-yellow filbert-shaped husk of the nut, his dusky neck a palpitating, gulping column between two skinny brown arms. Later in the day, having shared the workmen's humble meal of curried rice moulded and sewn into small bags made of palm leaf, having washed his teeth with water, using his forefinger as a brush, and resumed his white coat, he again betook himself to the ant-hill.

She was not at once visible, but soon, accompanied by the little girl, she came down the steps of the bungalow and walked slowly, aimlessly, it seemed, towards the farther edge of the clearing.

Hastily he put on his topee, ready for action should she look his way. But never a look ! A slight groan escaped him. On the two wandered, farther and farther, their figures gleaming white against the red earth of the clearing. She held an open parasol above her head. Anon she stopped and made as if to turn. With a galvanic motion he swept off his topee, but she had merely bent to examine a shrub. He heard the coolies behind him laughing, and, facing round swiftly, beheld them resume their work with a guilty air. "Laughstock!" he muttered, self-pityingly. A moment after he jumped up and walked quickly into the plantation.

And once again Sallie junior screamed. Una had remained for more than a little while beside the shrub.

Something moving on it had attracted her attention, and now, for the first time in her life, she was making the acquaintance of a leaf insect, a marvellous creature, with wings delicately veined, that clung to a twig, still as if carved, emerald in colour like the young foliage of the shrub.

"Oona ! Oona !" The child clung to her skirts. She looked round, and saw within a few yards of her something white crawling rapidly out of the plantation. It gave her a momentary start, did this stooping figure, but almost immediately she recognised the young Eurasian. Apparently he was ignorant of her presence, being very busy, presumably in his capacity as contractor. He seemed to be measuring the ground with a three-foot rule.

"It is nothing," she said to Sallie junior reassuringly. "Don't you know him ?"

He must have heard the remark, for he stopped measuring and came towards them, taking off his topee.

"Am I very alarming to young children ?" he asked. "Poor young thing." He patted the air with his hand.

"Not very ; she knows you now," replied Una. "I am afraid you surprised her. We thought that you were at work on the other side of the clearing."

"I had to circumvent the bungalow for business reasons," he returned, with an uneasy wriggle. Again the topee began to revolve. "I am full of business always, madam," he went on very nervously, "but you of course are one of the interruptions that—that make me return with zest to my labours."

"Well, I'm very glad to have seen you again," said

Una pleasantly. "I haven't forgotten the centipede. Good-bye, Mr. Fernandez. I see——"

"You have not forgotten my name then, missie," he interrupted with an excited gesture. "But please allow me to present you with a refresher." He laid the topee on the ground and, hurriedly searching his pockets, drew forth a card. "Thank you. I anticipated your acceptance; it wipes out my fit of apologising for the index on my hat-brim on a recent occasion."

Una took the card and examined it, biting her lip to avoid bursting into laughter.

"I notice you have crossed out your first name and put F. instead," she commented.

"Oah yess," he said with a casual air. "American style, madam. They call the barman at Willie's 'F'."

"Well, I must be going on my walk."

"One can obtain good American cocktails at Willie's," he went on in a breath, walking backwards in front of her as she advanced. "I think, as a whole, the wine is better there than at the Dustbin, and you know, missie, His Gracious Majesty the King has granted the barmaid at Willie's an old age pension. Oah yess, madam, I know London very well. And also I have heard that the present Government has allowed all the chestnuts to come out into the Parks."

"But I mustn't interrupt your working," she said, quickening her pace. "I like to see you working. Good afternoon."

"You like to see me working," he cried. The idea seemed to come as a shock to him. He darted aside to pick up his topee and then trotted beside her. "You may see me working, madam," he called out.

"Any time you may, by taking a stroll over to our ditches. Let me know that you are coming and you shall find me in a perspiring condition."

"Good-bye, good-bye," she said, her amusement becoming tinged with annoyance at his persistency.

"Yess, yess, you shall find me," he called out after her. Turning a little later she saw him striding away across the clearing, a solitary figure amid the long shadows of the sunset.

Night entered in these climes, so it seemed to her, not cheerily, presaging the firelight, the lamplight, but brooding and sad. At eventide an intense feeling of loneliness often took possession of her. It was then, sitting on the veranda, watching the red dying from the sky above the green tree-tops of the plantation, watching the unveiling of the evening star, more than at other times that she thought of home and longed for its shelter. There the problems of life had been easy of solution, but now— And she had no one to advise her.

She was learning to dread the approach of evening, the sound of the carriage wheels, the nods and winks of Mrs. Pawker; the good lady meant well, doubtless, and thought the attentions of this man, this magistrate, would be welcome enough.

He drove out nearly every evening after dinner and they sat together on the veranda, the Pawkers always leaving them on one pretext or another after the lapse of a few minutes. He never said a word that challenged her direct, but always did she feel herself the subject of a menace barely veiled. At those encounters he gave her glimpses of himself that filled her more than ever

with loathing. His was an intelligence that sought always a rotten core in every decent action, that honoured cunning above intellect, denied all other motives than self. Instinct seemed to tell her that it was not herself he wanted. There was little of love in his talk on that stifling veranda. He told her anecdotes illustrating the power of his position, the influence of his relatives, the wonderful subtlety of his intelligence. And from this he would wander on to gibe against the Pawkers, the Europeans at Sudora, everybody. Once indeed, at the beginning of these interviews, a sort of animal look had come over his face, and he had made as if to take her hand. But she had drawn quickly back. On that occasion, as was always the way when she attempted to leave the veranda, he had held her with what amounted to threats against Lloyd Guiy.

There were many causes that kept her from directly repulsing him : her timidity, his position, the evident authority, it seemed almost like a hold, he possessed over the Pawkers. But this power of injuring Lloyd Guiy was what constrained her most.

She would have denied this had anyone suggested it. In fact, reason had already bidden her put Lloyd Guiy from her thoughts. Probably he was too ashamed to write. That's what so many were who went abroad. Drifting, cutting the painter ! But in spite of that she was not the one to forsake old friends. Lloyd should never say that unwillingness to make a temporary sacrifice had given him the final push downwards. Her blue eyes were beginning to lose their easy look. Baylers gave her no respite. His evening visits were

becoming of longer duration. Once or twice already he had driven out at noon and again in the evening.

It was after such a midday visit that she had gone for a walk alone. Sunlight still flooded the clearing. But in the shadow of the plantation she had found coolness and a cloistered peace. Those grey aisles, green canopies, were fitting sanctuary for her troubled spirit. Here she could wander on amid a silence undisturbed, gathering strength.

She came at last to a section where the rubber tappers had been working that morning. At the bottom of the red-brown herring-bone grooves freshly cut in the smooth grey-green trunks, milky drops of latex were still visible. Each tree had an enamelled latex cup beside it resting inverted on a stick stuck into the ground. The sight of all this order, the sense it gave of ended solitude, put a finish to her dreams. She awoke to the fact that night was coming on, and retraced her steps. At the edge of the clearing she encountered Ferdinand.

He looked guilty, as though he had been expecting her. Indeed, it was fairly plain that he had deliberately put himself in her way. She felt annoyed and, nodding curtly, increased her pace.

"Missie, missie," he called out entreatingly.

"What is it?" she asked, stopping. "Do you want to speak to me?"

She looked at him with great sternness when he came up, but she could not forbear an inward smile. His nervousness was comic. He twirled his hat like a juggler. His stick-like legs were trembling under him.

"I wanted to address you a letter," he gasped

out at last, gazing at her as if mesmerised. "But once, when I was rescuer to you from the insects of the country, you observed me as your friend. I break the silence personally, thus saving a postage stamp, graciously inviting you to listen to my word of mouth."

"What is it? What can I do for you?"

"Can you do for me! Oh, missie!" he returned wailing. "It is that you have done for the miserable blighter who once bore an honoured name, but now describes himself merely as F. Fernandez. He sits all day long in his ditch, weeping and lamenting. The bitter tears run down his cheeks like orphans."

"What is the matter?" Una asked in great surprise.

"You said you liked to see me working," he went on volubly. "For a week I have wasted my time in doing so. Do you come? No, not much! In your absence I kiss the ground you trod on, but got tired of doing that when I found that a damn Chinaman treaded on it after you did."

Una began to walk on. "If you want anything, money or help of any sort, call at the bungalow and tell me," she said coldly. "But I can't listen to this."

"Missie!" he shrieked. Actually he dropped on to his knees. "Cast a pitiable eye in this direction. Look at this here loving heart among the worms and grasshoppers. I will be like a puppy-dog, carrying your hand-bag all over the town of London. Look at me!"

He ran beside her on hands and knees as she walked along. Unable to get rid of him she too began to run towards the bungalow.

But he rose and kept close to her.

"You may use me as your boot blackness," he cried. "See, I am your dog!" His tone changed. "You think that this Baylers will marry you," he screamed angrily. "Ah, you are a mistake! He is a wicked! He comes to see you, but all day he is with a bad woman, oah yess, I assure you, even now he is with her. Ask him when he comes to you to-night of Mrs. Roga. And for this double facer you would spit on me!"

"Please go away," said Una very sternly. They were near the bungalow. She stopped short. "Go away now before you get into trouble."

"You would spit on me because of my black skin!" he spluttered in a passion, waving his thin arms. But he obeyed her.

CHAPTER X

I DON'T believe Ferdinand ever called me a bad woman, I won't believe it, Mr. Nubkins. You say Miss Una Hamilton told you he did. You make me laugh, yes, you make me laugh! That you should believe everything that this Hamilton woman tells you! Especially what she tells you about me, when as all Sudora knows she is as jealous of me as a — It makes me wild, even now, to think of her daring to say such things. She, the white-faced milksop, she, the mincing missie, that always kept her feelings so well corseted, oh yes, so proper. I am glad to read at any rate that she had sense enough to see that Sidney Baylers cared not a flip of the finger for her, no, not at any time. He's not a fool; he's a man, wanting a woman, flesh and blood. Do you know how he described her to me, yes, even at the time when she was whining to herself about being persecuted by him? He said: "Don't take any notice about what people say concerning me and that Miss Hamilton. I want something more than sawdust." Sawdust! Sawdust!

"Take care, Mr. Baylers," I replied, when he made this remark, shaking my finger at him coquettishly—I can do this so prettily even now. "The sawdust may catch fire."

"It's too green, my dear Lolina," he snapped. I don't mean snapped like a dog. I mean he was so

quick, so ready. And, oh dear me, so—so pushing ! It was only the second time he had been in my private room at the back of the hotel bar, and there, you see, he was already calling me “ my dear Lolina.”

“ You mustn’t call me Lolina ; and I’m not green, sir ! ” I remarked quite coolly.

“ By G—, I know you’re not.” Then he looked at me so cunningly—and smiled. And I too laughed.

“ I’m hard, like seasoned wood,” I said, trying to cover myself.

“ That won’t do at all. You’re not like green sawdust. You admit it ! ” he retorted. “ You are easily kindled by the right torch.”

Not an inch could I wriggle.

“ In any case, you’re not hard, Lolina,” he went on. “ You have one of the softest, most beautiful figures. Why, Lolina, you don’t call this hard ? ” And before I knew what he was doing, he put out his hand and caught hold of my arm just by the shoulder.

Oh, I did jump up ! It was as if hot lightning had struck me. I shook off his hand and ran to the door. “ Mister,” I said, “ you must not try on such things with me. What do you take me for ? ”

I was in a boil with shame. How I panted ! And I didn’t know whether to dare to be angry or not, for he was the magistrate. What would he have done to my hotel if I had driven him away altogether ? Besides—

I can see him still, sitting there after I had sprung away from him ; it is one of the pictures burnt into my memory. He sat in my late husband’s, Mr. Roga’s, cane easy chair, looking, not at me, but at the green matting on the floor. His face was invisible, his

reddened, moist forehead only showing, with the veins standing out on it like cords. And his hands were clenched.

"You misunderstood," he muttered in a thick voice. "It was only in the cause of science. Don't be stupid."

"I am not stupid," I said bitterly. "I must attend to my customers."

And this was not an excuse, but very true, for already there were two or three people waiting at the bar to be served. It was because of them that I had not cried out when he had caught hold of me. I was glad he had not forced me to do so. Everything would have been spoilt. He would never have come again. And my name and business would have soon been finished in Sudora, as he could not have supported my presence there and, naturally, he would have sought to drive me from the town. A good name is worth more to a man than is a woman. That is the way of the East.

But I did not have to cry out, and so the customers at the bar had not the slightest knowledge that their magistrate was sitting in my room within a few feet of them. They laughed and talked with me when I slipped out into the bar, and I was pleasant as usual, and I thought that I was looking quite cool. But I was not. My cheeks were still red. One customer told me this.

"So long as it is not the nose, like you," I answered him. And everybody roared.

Oh yes, that is the way with the servants of the public. You see your barmaid always with smiling face, cracking jokes. You think her happy. The corkscrews and the bottles could tell you another

story ; it is these inanimate things, and not the public, that suffer when she feels distressed. Always on her feet, too. I know what barmaids have to suffer. Not that I suffered much. I did not, because I was always mistress.

There are, too, many customers who make one feel glad that the counter is there, and sorry that it does not reach to the ceiling. Sidney Baylers must have been one of these in his youth. I said to myself that evening as I walked to and fro serving my customers that never again would I be stupid enough to sit alone with him in my little room. So, the next time he visited me, I took him to the back garden where I had arranged a private table underneath a tree. And here he often sat of an afternoon, watching me at my sewing on the other side of that great big iron table. The little room at the back of the bar was being cleaned ! Oh yes ! It took so long to clean, as one could not work in the evening when customers were plentiful ! And it was so cool under the nice trees : the air of that little room was not good for an English magistrate !

I explained all this to him many times when he used to talk about the garden being so public. He was not cool, even in that garden. Oh no, no, no. How he used to get red and angry and in a perspiration ! And I laughed at his cunning, his flattery, at his meaning looks. I, of course, was cool and good-tempered, and cared not a snap. What can a hotel woman expect from man ? I used to put out my tongue at him, just the tip. Oh, how savage he used to look ! Threats !

" Oh yes, Mr. Magistrate," I used to say. " I know you are a very powerful man, but although you

threaten, I know you wouldn't accuse a poor widow like me of gambling, because she does not love you. You are too merciful. You are my friend and come to see me every afternoon. Here, take my fan and fan yourself ! Why you look so hot I don't know. Such a beautiful cool afternoon sitting out here on this beautiful cool lawn, and all the nice trees and the birds ! "

And then he would growl and drink great gulps of whisky, like a dog going mad. This was good for my business.

He was not always like that. Sometimes he was very cool, very dangerous, and then I had to beware what I said to him, for then it was my wit against his, and, what was worse, my determination against his. As the days went by I began to feel him putting out all his strength. I could feel, oh dear, myself growing weaker. I was thinking about him too much, wishing he wouldn't come and see me, sorry when he didn't, for he was the magistrate. Oh, the mosquitoes at that time, how they did worry me, always slap, slap, slap. And there wasn't any breeze to drive them off. I think they must have been his mosquitoes, sent especially by him to annoy me. He would have done that or anything to worry me then. And the heat of the day and the heat of the nights ! Not a drop of rain for a week, I'm sure ! The leaves of the palms and the ferns rattled like bones when you touched them, and the flowers of my double red hibiscus tree came out in the morning, and were dead, shrivelled, by sunset. I felt faint, wanting to lie about in long chairs always, parched inside, and my clothes like wet rags.

He didn't know about my being nervous. I talked just the same, showing him my gold tooth in my smiles, fanning him across the table, my eyes as bright and my talk as merry as ever it had been, though I felt fit to tremble sometimes what with the fearful hot days and the lack of sleep. No, he could not have known I was nervous.

It must have been what I said about weddings, how I liked going to such festivals. I saw him look up at me funnily when I made the remark, and my eyes, I know, gave some sort of flicker, showed just for an instant a barrier down. How hard he pressed me then! But I gave him no further opening, and he went away, looking as though he could have torn me to pieces.

"I don't like being played with," he said when he left. He did not offer to shake my hand.

"O-o-o-h," I said to myself, feeling all cold shivers, as I watched him drive away. Such a powerful man in the district, you understand, is the magistrate of Sudora.

I saw that I should have to seem more encouraging to him the next day in order to make up, and so on the following afternoon I dressed in my best black frock, with yellow blossoms in my hair, and much scent. And I waited by the iron table, sewing, and looking so young and pretty. But he never came. And the next day, and the next after, always waiting, using powder too and a little henna for my lips. But he came never.

"What game is he playing?" I wondered. But I could not detect any reason for his not coming. It did

make me feel irritable, so beautiful was I in my new gown, with the yellow flowers in my hair.

Ask Ferdinand how beautiful I was. I do not wish you to believe my word alone. He knows. He came in and saw me sitting at the iron table. So different I looked, he said, to what I did a week or two before, when last he had visited the hotel. He, I may tell you, looked different too, strained and troubled. But I made no comment to him about that.

"Do you think so, Mr. Fernandez?" I replied, glad that somebody at any rate should say nice things about me.

"Oh yes, Mrs. Roga. Oh yes! And your dress—you are a shining magnificent."

It is very nice to meet anyone like that, who will tell you that you look pretty when you know you do. I mean that Ferdinand was not a liar when he said that I was beautiful and my dress magnificent. The dress had just come from Pelung. European women, so the catalogue said, were employed in the making of it, women like that Miss Hamilton. "Yes, it is nice," I said, stroking the lovely cloth.

"Which one, please, the dress or the insider of it?" he asked, putting his two elbows on the bar, and grinning faintly at me from under his tilted topee. He hadn't been to see me for some time, and I was so glad to welcome him again. Such a friendly face he has sometimes.

"I thought you were frightened of my hotel since we had all those policemen coming to it. Frightened of getting into trouble."

"Oh—a—no." He looked funny and confused, I

thought ; so I went on talking about nothing, and then presently I asked :

“ Where have you been, then, these evenings ? ”

“ Ah, Mrs. Roga, when the big bow-wow is after the bone, then the little puppy-dog he does a bolt, oh yes,” he said, smiling ; but, as I could see, only pretending to be happy.

I told him I didn't understand him at all. But I had an inkling of his meaning, nevertheless. Mr. Baylers was the big bow-wow.

“ He wants every bone in the damn country,” he cried suddenly, his features working. “ That a magistrate ! That rotten bloater ! Can't you see his face is bloated ? And all the women let him gnaw at them like bones ! And I mustn't gnaw ! I'm naught ; a mere black-skinned cipher ! Oh ! Oh ! Oh ! ”

He brushed his coat sleeve hurriedly over his eyes, and turning right round, bolted through the open door, into the garden, all out into the dark. He was howling and crying.

I was thunderstruck. It had never crossed my mind for one instant that he was so fond of me as all that. He liked my company, of course, as a friend. All the men do ; if it were otherwise how should I have kept a hotel successfully ? But to go out into the garden and howl and blubber about me ! Why, I had been feeling more like a mother towards him !

It cut my heart to hear this poor boy howling in the garden and, in any case, I could not have avoided going out to quieten him. Howling in the garden is very bad for the hotel business. The Chinese customers don't

like such noises, because they are afraid it may be the ghost of some disgraceful ancestor. And the Europeans always keep away from what might be a strange dog in the dark, except when they've had too much to drink, and then they won't keep away from anything. Yes, it was not wrong of me to go out and quieten him. Such a boy!

He had squatted on my iron table under the tree; his white suit made him just visible through the darkness.

"Ferdinand!" I cried very sharply, hastening up, and hitting him many times on the back. This made his howling sound like "Oh—lo—oh—lo—oh—lo!" It was such a baby, screaming and then stopping to hold his breath, shaking the table all the while, just as a monkey in a passion shakes the bars of a cage. And all for the love of me! I could not feel angry. But it had to be stopped at any cost.

"Ferdinand!" I cried again, hitting his back hard. "You are being sorry about nothing. Don't be so stupid!"

"Oh—lo—oh—lo—oh—lo—oh—lo——!"

"Perhaps you are loved in return better than you think. Why don't you stop howling and ask?"

"Oh—lo—oh—lo—oh—lo—oh—lo——!"

What should I do? It seemed as though nothing would stop him. And his howling echoed through the whole country. Every jungle noise had ceased. The night-jars had fled. Every bird, every beast, every insect was listening to Ferdinand, listening to the shame of my hotel. How could I stop him? I stood

helpless before this devil that possessed him. Then it struck me to appeal to his pride.

"Ferdinand!" I screamed. "Ferdinand!"

"Oh—lo—oh—lo—oh—lo—oh—lo——!"

"Remember the barmaid at Willie's," I shrieked. "What would she think if she could see you now?"

My words acted like magic. At once the fearful howling ceased. His head was bent between his shoulders now, and he sobbed quietly. I put my hand on his arm. Oh, how damp he felt! And I felt damp too, cold and clammy in spite of the fearful heat and steaminess of the evening.

"What was the matter with you?" I asked, speaking very sharply because I did not want any love nonsense.

"My works must have gone wrong inside," he answered in an ashamed way. "The brake wouldn't act—and all my private grievances had to make themselves public." He pulled himself together with an effort and sat up. "With apologies to your ear for the noisy outpourings of my affliction," he added.

"I don't mind, stupid boy," I said. "Come and have something warm to drink. You'll be better then."

When we got back to the light I talked about all sorts of things to try and cheer him up. I was very careful to keep away from all love subjects, first of all because I never did encourage such talk in my hotel, and in the second place because the thought of love seemed to turn him into a howling mass of melancholy.

I must have had an affection for him to allow him to stay in my bar after making such noises. Perhaps, I will confess, in some ways it was flattering to me that such a handsome young fellow should have fallen a victim to my beauty ; for I was old enough to be his mother. Can one ask for further proof of my beauty ?

And every evening after that noise-making he was at the hotel, leaning on the counter of the bar, and paying me all sorts of attentions. Yet you say, Mr. Nubkins, that he was at this time calling me a bad woman to your Miss Hamilton ! Miss Hamilton !

Do you know what Ferdinand told me concerning that impudent Hamilton woman, that governess, or servant as I think she was ? Oh yes, I heard all about the centipede, but a very different tale to the one you tell. Do you know that Ferdinand could not get on with making his ditches because she was always coming out to see him, eh ? Do you know she sent him loving notes, which he could not show to me because he tore them up at once, as he does not approve of flirting, eh ? And so he left his business of making ditches, and came back, very glad to escape ; while your Miss Hamilton was the catspaw of Baylers, trying to become the wife of the magistrate, if you please. Like her impudence !

Now you have the tale just as Ferdinand told it me bit by bit, standing at the counter. If you don't believe me, I shall just smile all the same, without yielding to irritation. I know what to believe about your Miss Hamilton, and can think of her with, yes, calm contempt. And so also can Ferdinand, forgiving

all the tales she spread about concerning her conquest of him. He never cared for her, and his howling that night in my garden was merely an expression of jealousy concerning Sidney Baylers and his visits to the hotel, mixed with fear that I might consider his character compromised because he had brushed a centipede off her skirt.

"Why should you care what I think about you, Ferdinand?" I asked him when he told me this, not taking any notice of what he said about Baylers. That was my affair.

"You are my father and my mother and sister and brother, to speak as does a native," he replied, smiling faintly. "You are my drowning straw," he went on. "I clutch at you, and you act as a lifebuoy during my difficulties."

"But have you any difficulties, Ferdinand?"

"I perspire with difficulties," he answered in a depressed way. He took off his topee, and mopped his forehead with his red silk handkerchief. "Every one at the Grotto is a difficulty nowadays. Can't even get an egg up there nowadays. Yes, Mrs. Roga, they're all against me, down to the hens."

"Dear, dear!" I said sympathetically.

"Are you sorry for me?" he asked quickly.

"Of course I am, Ferdinand, my poor boy," I said, and I'm sure I looked so.

"Then be sorrier than ever," he cried in a flash. "Prove your sorrow. You share my difficulties and I'll share your lot. This little hotel lot. Oh, do, Lolina! I find now that I'm almost an orphan. I want to add your enormous beauty to my relatives,

so that they can see I am not to be sneezed at, or paltered with. Great Scott and Dickens, how I love you ! ”

He disappeared. Bending over the counter and looking down, I saw that he was on his knees. How he raved ! I will not set down his speeches here. I will not even say how surprised I felt at this sudden proposal. Instead I will merely point to him and ask you, Mr. Nubkins, if you still believe that he, this loving fellow, ever said at any time whatever to your Miss Hamilton that I was a bad woman ?

He got up and tried to grasp my hand over the counter, hurting his knuckles on an open bottle of lemonade, which fell over, spraying my dress.

“ Ferdinand,” I cried, “ what are you doing ? Such behaviour ! What is it ? ”

“ I want you to marry me, of course,” he explained, looking shamefaced.

“ You just behave yourself in my bar,” I said, speaking very sharply ; “ and you mustn’t knock over bottles of lemonade. Marry you ! Oh, nonsense ! You don’t know what you’re talking about. Wait till you’re grown up ! ”

“ But I want to grow up here along with you,” he pleaded. “ I can’t grow up any longer at the Grotto. I feel myself getting stunted there. They have cut off my supplies of grub, and destroy my appetite with insults, all for your sake. They don’t like me coming to see you. Mother calls me Hopping Bird, and Guzzling Wormpuller. And sometimes—sometimes—breakfast is merely an insulting exhibition of empty plates.”

No wonder he was weak, that the tears came easily. Such treatment made me indignant. I said that I would not marry him, but that I would give him a meal whenever he wanted one.

He accepted this offer after he had tried in vain to get me to consent to the marrying. He said that half a loaf was better than no bread. Poor boy, he did look downcast. Every day after that he came, and we had tea together, standing opposite each other at one end of the bar counter. Sometimes customers were in the bar ; generally the two of us were alone together. At five o'clock in the afternoon business is quiet, usually. You see, men just then are doing a little work so as to be able to leave it off when the hour strikes. Oh yes, I know !

But a man like Sidney Baylers kept no hours. I was never surprised to see him at any time. I was always on the watch for his footstep, knowing that one day he was bound to come back. It is not strange, then, that I should have been thinking about him on that certain afternoon when Ferdinand and I stood eating our toast and drinking our tea in the hot bar-room, with the fierce mellow sunlight pouring in towards us through doors and windows, like flames. I was thinking ; Ferdinand was thinking ; every bird is silent at that hour ; every animal mute. I could hear him masticating a mouthful of toast. Then suddenly he said :

“ What is that noise, Mrs. Roga ? ” calling me from my thoughts, making me alert.

“ That ! ” he said again. I heard the noise. There was somebody moving in my little room. I kept

money there, so I rushed in, fearing a thief. It was Sidney Baylers.

He must have crept in through the door at the back. My Chinese servant always slept in the afternoon.

I nearly cried out, but his uplifted hand kept me silent and, obeying a look from him, I softly closed the door.

"You must go," I said very low. "You mustn't come in here. What do you think, that you dare steal into my house like this? Go away: I can't trust you, you know that." I was panting, out of breath with fear. I hated him for creeping in like that, and I didn't want to make a noise or be angry with him or——

"I can't go away," he whispered, trying to get close to me; but I retreated from him. "You must trust me, Lolina, you must, or I shall go mad!"

He came towards me still, so slowly, so entreatingly, but so fiercely. I knew myself and how I felt for him. If he had touched me then— And he meant me harm—he would never mean me good. My back was against the door, and my thoughts whirled as though a halter was round my neck. I put up my hand.

"Keep away from me," I said in a dry whisper. "I don't want you: I hate you, you white man. Keep away. Very soon I marry somebody else: somebody I like, and who treats me with honour."

"I don't believe you," he grinned; but what I said stopped him for a second. And then, before he could come farther, before he had recovered, I opened wide the door giving on to the bar, and stood in the entrance and cried:

“ Ferdinand, you have asked me to name a day for marrying you, and now I say, let it be as soon as you choose.”

“ Oh, Mrs. Roga ! Oh, dear Mrs. Roga ! ” I saw the boy clambering over the counter and, shutting the door leading to the small room, I stood with my hand on its handle awaiting him.

CHAPTER XI

SO there was Ferdinand, on his knees again, clinging to my skirt. He called me his life-preserver, his intoxicator, and all sorts of other things. I was his scented flower, his ripe fruit, his—oh, I don't know what I wasn't !

"If you don't get up off the floor of my hotel," I said in a cool whisper, "I will break off our engagement. Think of what the customers would say if they saw you."

But I knew I couldn't expect him to stop all his talk at once. It would not have been possible for any man just engaged to me to avoid rapturous speeches. I opened the door and looked in. Baylers was gone.

"Come in here and sit down, Ferdinand," I said.

"Oh, my stimulant ! The only one I ever want ! Am I in a drunken condition ? Is it true ? Is my ambition at its top notch ? Is my work for the rest of life only to remain beside you ? "

"Don't you make any mistake. You sit down there in that cane chair. And if I ever catch you stopping your work with your father, out you go, out of my hotel, remember that. I want no loafers about here." You see he was mad with love and with poetry, all about me.

"I'm only giving you a new home, only the name of husband," I went on. "You quite understand that."

I don't care a snap of the finger for you. A little boy like you ! ”

That is all he was, a little boy, eighteen, nineteen, twenty, twenty-one, and I was over thirty. I was sorry for him. Evidently he had been thinking that I cared. He looked disappointed but still rather unbelieving. Why? Oh, well, he was at the age of youth, the age when every mirror reflects perfection. I was like that when I was his age ; those who have read what goes before know that I am not now.

“ Oh, Lolina,” he said, making to slide off my late husband's cane chair. “ Cruel fair one ! False encourager ! Such coyness ! But I will wear it off ! ”

“ It is not coyness. Don't be stupid, Ferdinand. We are doing business. I marry you because of your high Portuguese blood, and because it suits me to get married. You are marrying me for a home.”

But I could not get him to believe this. And although time after time he promised me not to refer to such things again, always, when we talked over the wedding, he would say that a home was nothing to him ; that all he wanted to do was to bask in the light of his sun, which, so he said, always shone brighter when he was there to be shone on. And, as the days passed, he grew worse. He offered to do anything. He said once he would even be my puppy-dog. Yes, kneeling there in my little room he said it. He said he wanted to kiss my feet.

“ Oh, get up, stupid boy ! ” I cried out to him, not letting him. “ Fancy doing such a thing in this room. It's not even a room ; it's an office. Not a place for

crawling about in like some little honey bear. Get up ! ”

He wouldn't get up, and so at last I had to leave the room. It is a terrible state of affairs when the proprietress of a hotel cannot sit in her own office because of pestering men. But I was not able to, as you see. Perhaps the thought of this will help you to realise how good-looking I was at that time.

Ah, the poor fellow ! Yes, even now I am sorry for him. He must have loved me strongly, for he never tried to borrow any money during all the time of our engagement, as is the custom with so many Eurasians. He did not get much money from his parents. I am sure of that. They did not like him going off and marrying me one little bit. In fact, they were very rude to me, and Mrs. Fernandez, I know, said all sorts of things about me to try and break our engagement. How do I know ? Because Ferdinand told me.

What a time the poor boy must have had in that bungalow ! They call it the Grotto. I call it a hut, a mere native hut. I would scorn to put a dog in it, so old and leaky is its atap roof, so rotting and ant-riddled its beams and floors. The posts are of nibong palm ; I saw them ; the chicks, Malay made and very torn. And in Ferdinand's bedroom were actually unframed coloured prints tacked to the walls. I say “are” and “is,” acknowledging at the same time that, since I have been away from Sudora, Mr. Fernandez may have repaired this hut of his. But when I drove by, about six months ago, it looked the same as it did the day I visited them after the announcement of our engagement : rank weeds growing all over the compound,

with the hens clucking and scratching among them, the wooden walls of the bungalow weather-stained black and brown, the atap thatch pearl grey and bone bare with age, not a tinge of yellow left in it. Bougain-villæas and alamandas, it is true, hide the rotten wood-work, the broken railings. But go on to their veranda. Look at the torn Japanese matting, the texts on the walls, the framed photograph of Mrs. Fernandez in her wedding-dress. Oh, my goodness me !

"Almost as good as a marriage certificate, but not quite," I said to Mrs. Fernandez as I stood admiring this wonderful photograph on the day I went to call. Yes, I called on her, not she on me, I confess that. She wouldn't come and see me. She said it would kill her with shame to be seen going into a hotel. And Ferdinand worried and worried at me, so I humbled myself so far as to oblige him. I can quite believe she said all the things Ferdinand told me she did about me, trying to break our engagement. How she replied to my comments show her spiteful mind.

"Did you ever wear a wedding-dress, missis ?" she asked, quick as a lizard.

"I did, of course ; I shall wear the same one again when I marry your son," I answered, trying hard not to be angry.

"Son," she screamed. "He's no son of mine ! He's a——"

"Mother, mother," cried old Mr. Fernandez, frightened out of his wits, I could see, that his wife would say something offensive. You know the Portuguese will not insult a guest : they rather die, if they are of high descent, so proud are they. My late

husband, Roga, was like that ; and this old man, Mr. Fernandez, I saw at once, was the same. Lean and scraggy like an old game cock was this old man, with a beak of a nose and a bald head ; but I liked his appearance ; he looked all breed, tottering with breed, like my late husband Roga.

“ Let me sit down and talk to you, Mr. Fernandez,” I said. “ We shall get on well together. You remind me of my late husband Roga.”

Ferdinand, of course, was jumping all over the veranda and acting the happy engaged man ; but the rest of us were too busy eying each other like strange dogs to take much notice of him at first.

“ Now you, Hopping Bird ! ” cried Mrs. Fernandez, very angry, of course, because I had turned my back on her. “ Hop along with a chair for your young lady.”

And I could hear her walking up and down and sniffing behind me, and I knew she was dying with envy, and was trying to pick holes in me. But she couldn't. Black and shiny as a crow's wing was my hair, and my hat was trimmed with yellow braid and jet. I had on my new black satin dress. “ Look at the back of that and try and find fault,” I said to myself.

The sun was blazing in, showing how the dust lay in inches everywhere on this dreadful veranda. There were signs of chickens about, and small red ants were running all over the matting, carrying off crumbs and tiny sugar crystals. It was a dirty, unswept, disgraceful house, and I pulled my skirts high, showing my new patent shoes, and flicked the chair with a handkerchief before I sat on it. And Mr. Fernandez helped

me to flick, such a polite old man is he ; at least he began to flick, and then suddenly stopped, looking, I could see, at his wife in a confused way, as though he had offended her.

"It's a clean chair, missis," she called out. "I dusted it myself this morning."

"Strange how the dust does accumulate, is it not, Mr. Fernandez ?"

"Chairs can be washed : a woman's character can't," cried Mrs. Fernandez, coming round from the back of my chair.

"But faces can, and white clothes, and necks, madam," I made answer, sitting in the chair, and keeping very cool.

And she was all on the boil, and the perspiration was streaming down her, and her hair was getting every moment more untidy. Oh, she was a dirty looking female, her hair grey and done up anyhow, and her face parchmenty, bloated, wrinkled. How she dares to wear such a low-necked blouse with her neck, I don't know. And she was bursting out of her clothes, so fat is she. Her daughter, that came in bringing tea, is even fatter ; an animated jelly is the daughter. I could see that she disliked me worse than her mother did. And she too looked as if she wanted to say a lot of nasty things but was holding her tongue. I tell you that I saw her drink the tea before I touched mine. Foolish, was it not ? but one never knows among Eurasians.

I forgot to mention that I was wearing the gold rings and chains that my late husband Roga gave me. Never before had such things been seen on that veranda, I

am certain. Oh, they are poor people. The old man's white duck trousers were frayed at the bottom, and the steel rims of his eye-glasses were all rusty. Still, he is a nice old man, and of a much better manner than the women of his household.

"I should be glad to become your relation, at any rate," I told him.

"You never thought to have such a young father, I'm certain of that," came from Mrs. Fernandez. Such jealousy as she was exhibiting!

"I never thought to have such a nice father," I said, taking the old man's hand. He would have kissed mine, I'm sure, had his wife not been there, such is the chivalry of the high-born Portuguese. As she was, he dropped it.

"We formally welcome you to our family," he said hurriedly. "Since you both seem so determined to get wedded what can we do else?"

"I told them if they did not I would be a suicider!" burst in Ferdinand. "One morning they would wake to find my blood upon their own heads. They would discover on going outside a blighted youth hanging suspended from the nearest coco-nut tree, with his last kick gone for ever. Oh yes, oh yes, oh yes. Don't you believe me, Lolina? Oh yes, I was in earnest, I assure you!"

"He was, he was. Another moment and I should have lost the right hand of my business," assented old Mr. Fernandez. He must have noticed a look of unbelief in my face, for he went on, "We proved that. You see, Mrs. Fernandez and myself, to speak plainly, had other wishes for this boy. We didn't

want to have him go marrying outside of his own family. But when we said he wasn't to, he replied that, if he couldn't be a hotel proprietor he would be a suicider. So in the morning I said to Mrs. Fernandez, who was very determined, 'Don't be too hard on the boy,' I said. 'Give him a little rope.' But she misunderstood what I meant and gave him the clothes line."

"The little wretch! I did not think he would do anything, driving people out of their wits like that," cried Mrs. Fernandez violently.

"Oh yes, five minutes longer and you would have found a dead 'un," said Ferdinand in excitement. He had told me some confused tale before. I thought he was exaggerating, but no.

"I found the note he had left twenty minutes too late, twenty minutes after the hour he mentioned that he had selected for breathing his last. There he was, on a barrel under the coco-nut palm, with the rope round his neck all ready, and looking at his watch. The scare I got! And all on account of you, madam!"

"My watch had gone wrong," explained Ferdinand. "I was saved by its hair spring. Yes, when I get cross I do anything, you may bet your tall hats on that. Saved for love!"

So affecting was his speech that the girl, Amy, that lump of jelly, burst into weeping. And even I felt a tear mingle with my perspiration. How he must have loved me at that time, the foolish boy! And I didn't care a little bit for him, but married him, I acknowledge it, just to spite Sidney Baylers. And I was still more determined on the wedding now that I had seen Mrs.

Fernandez and her daughter. They were both bitter against me. Even after we had bought our licence in Pelung they were bitter against me, egging the old man on to call on me by stealth for the purpose of trying to get me to break the engagement. I gave him of my best brandy when he came, so that he returned more than once. And, in the end, I am certain he was reconciled to his new relation. How courtly he looked when he kissed my hand. "Ferdinand helps me in my business," he told me. "And we sought to bind him closer to us, but that was not to be."

I assured him he need not be frightened of his son stopping work after the wedding. "I want him to work," I said. "He's still bound close to you. How could you bind him closer, Mr. Fernandez?"

"We thought of contracting him out in marriage to a female cousin," he explained haltingly. He and I were in my little room at the back of the bar, and he was sitting in the cane arm-chair with a glass of brandy and water beside him. Dear me, how he reminded me of Mr. Roga, my late husband: the same precise manner; the same way of folding his hands as if at peace with everyone in the world; the same taste in brandy. "But I am becoming more content," he went on. "I see plainly that Ferdinand will be very happy here. I, too, shall visit you often."

I went over to his chair and kissed his forehead, a daughter's kiss.

"I can't have you to live here always," I said, knowing the ways of our Eurasian race and their fondness for an easy life. "But come sometimes."

Our last interview at that time was on the evening

before the bridal festival. When he said goodnight he solemnly wished me very great happiness. "Has Ferdinand ever told you how he obtained his name?" he inquired as he walked out of the door. I remembered afterwards that he chuckled slyly.

"No, Mr. Fernandez. How did he?"

"Ask him after the wedding; it's a family secret."

A family secret! I asked Ferdinand before the wedding, when he came round to the hotel on his bicycle, what the secret was, and he became so red in the face, and would not tell me. "It must be something shameful," I said. "You must let me know what it is." Then he explained, all the while growing redder, how that his father was referring to an occasion when his mother found him with no clothes on at all, and——

"Did you deliver those invitations for the wedding?" I asked, beginning to talk about something else as quickly as possible. Nearly everybody in Sudora had been invited, except the Europeans, as I wanted to make my marriage very public. We had kept the date secret until the last moment.

Sidney Baylers had received his invitation only that evening. I wondered what he was thinking: whether he would think about me at all, or just laugh and tear the card in two, and fling the pieces away. At least he knew by now that there was one woman, yes, one, a Eurasian hotel-keeper, a server behind bars, that would not accept shame at his hands; one whom now he had lost for ever. How I wished him parched nights, sleepless nights, such as my love for him had given me; nights when the darkness seemed alive,

when the silence whispered, when mind and body never rested, never for a moment, when I rose and walked in misery through the room, out on to the veranda, yes, perhaps barefoot on into the mists, on to the grass lawn all covered with dew. Was I doing right in marrying this Ferdinand, this boy whom I cared less than nothing for? How often I asked myself the question, answering it in one way sometimes, then in another!

Better escape this temptation altogether, I told myself. Get married and don't sit lonely brooding over that white man. He's far above you; he'll never do you any good. Then I used to think: "If I do, I've lost him for ever, and if I don't there might just be a chance——"

Well, one can never be certain about marriage. Perhaps I was a little hasty in marrying Ferdinand, but I chose my path and I walked it. Here, in your country, I should have had more time to think, but in Sudora marriage is very easy and very quickly accomplished. The Bishop's assistant issues the licences. No banns, no fees. I had my wedding-dress, a dress quite good enough for such a wedding, such a stupid wedding.

CHAPTER XII

MY wedding-day ! I awoke sooner than any bird. Light and scanty had been my sleep that night. When I swung open the heavy wooden shutters the sun had not yet risen. All the jungle was still, every tree, every palm motionless, as if enchanted by that so mysterious light, the dawn light. The freshness, the purity of breaking day, sweet as flowers, held me. I stood by the window and watched the flushed sky. How red was the sky, how glorious the sun when it came, how dazzling. So came the day of my first wedding also, when I was still a girl from the convent, white-dressed, lily-innocent, when Roga brought me the liberty which comes to all women through marriage.

Perhaps you will say when you read this : " What business has a Eurasian woman to write so stupidly ? She has a black skin : she is an animal and ought to think only of her necessities, her food, her clothes." I write as I feel. If I lived in this city of London and had to endure always the contemplation of its filthiness, had to smell always its mud, its eating-places, its beggars, its hair-dressers' shops, had to breathe always the intestinal gases of its garish vehicles, had to feel myself polluted, like an insect crawling over a refuse heap, then I am sure my poetry would leave me and I

should never, never write like this again. I should be numbed, my gladness all gone.

Even now in this room at Paddington, when I pause in my writing and glance out into your streets, into your hideous sewers of streets, moving with diseased and living things, nauseating to behold, I have to look hurriedly away again, afraid my gladness will leave me for ever, afraid to forget the sun.

I will not forget the sun. No, never. I shall think of it always and warm myself in the glory of it. I write of it now as it came in glory on my wedding morning.

And also I write of how I caught myself feeling very sorry. I was glad to be married, but sorry about the bridegroom. He was well-meaning, and loved me, I am certain, but when I considered him as a husband he appeared not at all worthy of me. For one thing he was so thin. In his frock-coat he looked too thin. Where he got that frock-coat I do not know, but I think it must have belonged to the Fernandez family for generations. It smelt very horribly of pepper and camphor, and looked greenish at the seams. Ferdinand was sneezing continually. In the morning when he came up to the hotel to visit me, so proud of his bridal costume, he was sneezing ; later on too in the church. I was glad for some reasons he was sneezing so much. If he had not been sneezing, perhaps he would have wanted to kiss me, as he had tried to do already more than once, forgetting, as I pointed out, about our bargain, and that he was marrying me simply for a home.

It was a most disagreeable coat. I tried to get him to take it off and put on a white one. He wouldn't.

"But it's that coat that is making you sneeze," I said.

"Oh no, Lolina, it's not the coat. It's love. I'm all one big cold in the head: all the heat of the head has run to the heart; and it goes jumpity, jumpity, like a little puppy-dog waiting for dinner."

"Nonsense, stupid boy."

"I'm in a state of influenza about you, I assure you. I was going to have a hot bath yesterday but my socks had to be washed for the wedding and I couldn't get the bath tub. Tchou—tchu—oh dear me! They are hanging in the garden of the Grotto drying now, darling. Next time I have them washed I shall hang them up to dry in the garden of Eden. Tchu—tchu——"

He meant, of course, my hotel garden.

Tears came to my eyes. "Oh, do get away with that nasty smelling frock-coat, Ferdinand. I have offered you a home, but not it. Take it away: don't come close. You are driving me all into a perspiration."

"Tchu—tchu—Lolina, Mrs. Roga—I am your puppy-dog, your pen-wiper, your door-mat, your—oh, tchu—tchu—tchu!"

"Get off your knees and go away, stupid boy—yes! at once! How can I dress for the wedding when every time I look round there you are on the floor, looking like a praying mantis?—shoo—shoo!"

I drove him out of the hotel in double quick time. Perhaps you think I was cruel. I felt cruel and very angry with him. He was so thin. Like a bit of stick with a tear-drop on the end of it. Kneeling down there and howling! What did he want to be so

melancholy for on our wedding morning ? keeping me from dressing too, making me also feel melancholy and think about Baylers. What a miserable morning it was becoming. I should have liked to have been by myself in the forest with the rain pattering down on the leaves above, with the tree-trunks around me damp and sorrowful. But I was in my beautiful bedroom beside the open windows, in the midst of the morning airs, the heat, the radiance, the sunshine, looking at my reflection in my long looking-glass, whilst the two Malay women, who had come to help me, busied themselves in arraying me as a bride. I ought to have been happy, but I was not.

They were used to such work, were these two old women. How deft were their gnarled fingers in lacing me, in hooking my lovely cream silk wedding gown, in braiding my hair with sweet-smelling jessamine, just as before it had been braided for my late husband Roga. They had all the materials of their art with them, kohl and blackening for eyelashes and eyebrows, henna for the lips and finger-tips. Their rice powder I would not let them use, having my own, violet scented, bought in Pelung. My handkerchief I saturated with scent from England's cherry blossom. Yes, on my wedding-day I smelt of every lovely flower, and no flower could have looked more beautiful, so the old women said. And I know they did not lie : my long looking-glass told me that.

Warm morning had become stifling noonday when I stepped into my open carriage and drove to the church. The air was simmering on the white, dusty roads. The bright green trees drooped under the glare. And my

horse and driver were steaming and dripping with perspiration by the time we drew up at the church entrance, a mile or so from my hotel. What was my condition when, placing a hand on Mr. Fernandez's shoulder, I stepped out of the carriage? Oh, hot and damp! Hot and damp! All my clothes were growing tighter, and my new patent leather shoes were pinching. Boiled and mangled, that is how I felt.

It was the publicity of my wedding as well as my tight clothes that made me feel hot. Part of the drive to the church had been through the town. All the Chinese shop-keepers were at their doors staring; all their wives and babies were at the upper windows laughing and calling. Little children lined the streets. I threw copper coins to the beggars, smiling all the time, and the ostrich feather in my hat was waving in the sunlight, dazzling white. They remember my wedding in Sudora, and my hat too. I had the bridal veil in a bag beside me, ready to put on before the wedding ceremony. People told me that no widow should wear a veil on her wedding-day. I care nothing for custom.

"Every seat is occupied," whispered old Mr. Fernandez as he led me along the red gravel pathway, through the gaily dressed crowd of Malays and Klings and Chinese, men and women. What heat, what a sun, what a blue sky! The people were all of them buzzing and chattering and whispering; and I was smiling as a bride should, taking no notice of them, but looking straight along the path towards the red corrugated iron porch of the church.

"Ferdinand has secured another best man," Mr. Fernandez whispered. "He told me I was to tell you

that for your sake he would have filled the church with best men. He has got a European friend. He met this gentleman on the way to church and insisted on his coming. This new best man is dressed merely in a white suit, but he is the best best man, being a European."

I scarcely listened to all this chatter, being busy with my fan and my bouquet, and next I had to go to the ante-room and put on my veil, while Mr. Fernandez waited in the porch for me. He was to give me away.

Afterwards I went up the church aisle on his arm, past all those crowds of people. I did not recognise a single one of them ; my eyes seemed to be dimmed in that steamy air. It was so hot.

Ferdinand was at the end of the aisle, sneezing and very excited. I looked at the tall man in a white suit standing beside him. It was Mr. Lloyd Guiry.

"Oh !" I said, quite loud. I'm sure the congregation must have heard me.

"A bit of luck for me," he whispered, smiling, almost laughing, so pleased was he to see me. "I never expected this ; I didn't know you were going to be married at all, Mrs. Roga."

"Roped him in just as I was strolling down churchwards," explained Ferdinand, his face all shining with perspiration and excitement. "I didn't let him go off, you may bet your tall hats on that. Oh no, there are no flies on me !"

"How could there be, stupid boy, when you wear that peppery smelling frock-coat ? It would kill them to settle on you."

Such a stupid boy, and so thin. All through the

service he was sneezing. He sneezed the parting out of his hair and the curl out of the clergyman's whiskers. I wanted to sneeze too, but, if I had, my bridal gown would have given under the armpits, so old and tight was it, so I stopped myself by burying my nose in my bouquet. Mrs. Fernandez would have been delighted, I am sure, to see me burst under the armpits on my wedding-day. A nasty, spiteful, dowdy old woman she is ; and she looked it, sitting there in the front pew with her fat daughter beside her, eaten up with jealousy, of course.

She came up and spoke after the service, whilst Ferdinand and I were waiting for the lady to play for us as we walked down the aisle. Something had happened to the bellows of the harmonium. Most of the congregation were going out. It was so hot in that little tin church.

" So they have stuck you to the bird-lime now, have they, Hopping Bird ? " she said to Ferdinand, glancing at me sideways so mischievously.

" Oh, mother, don't call me these pet names before all this congregation of peoples," whispered Ferdinand, looking irritated. " They'll all think I'm a silly sort of josses."

" They will be correct in their thinkings," she replied.

" Not much, not much," he answered. And then, brightening : " Excuse me, ladies all, while I dash over and expostulate with the harmoniumeress ; she seems to have got jammed between the pedal and the deep C of her instrument, ho ho ! " He left my side and made his way through the crowd.

" Can't we leave without waiting for the playing ? "

I asked Mrs. Fernandez. Oh, what a hat she had on ! And her mantle !

"Don't ask me, Mrs. Roga," she replied. "What should I know of your fashionable wedding customs ? "

"I thought you knew something about weddings," I said. "Excuse me."

"When I married I married somebody with a name," she hissed.

"I like your taste in names," I said, keeping very cool. Then I added, looking hard at her mantle: "But I don't like your taste in patchwork."

"It's better than your taste in foundling paupers, missis." She would have shrieked at me if we hadn't been in church, I'm sure, the spiteful, dowdy woman.

"What do you mean ? " I said. "I don't understand you."

"Ask your husband, that's all," she replied, with such a dark look. "Ask Ferdinand."

The poor boy hurried back just then and heard her utter his name. But he never dreamt that his mother and I had been talking angrily.

"Ferdinand," he cried. "That's the boy. That's the happy bridegroom. Music starting up now. Here we go. Slap bang, American fashion ! Bridegroom taking bride's arm. Mother, father's. And you, Mr. Guiy, taking my sister Amy's."

He did look happy as we swept down the aisle together arm-in-arm, to the lovely music of the harmonium. Never did I see him looking happier. His every bead and trickle of perspiration was shining with happiness. His collar was already crumpled and limp, and his pale blue necktie spotted. And how

everybody sneezed when his friends patted him on the back and wished him luck ! It was nice to see him happy and loving me, it was nice to hear all the talk of these laughing people, yes, oh, dear me ! it is nice to be a bride.

At the end of the church we waited to go into a room to sign our names in the clergyman's books. Just then I heard Lloyd Guiy, who was just behind me, mutter "Una !" and then a girl's voice, from the pew on my left, said, so coldly and metallically : "How do you do ?"

It was a European girl—I was surprised ! I am sure I had not asked such people to my wedding—dressed in a white frock and wearing a plain sun helmet. She was as pale as a bit of paper, a pasty complexioned thing—her to be called handsome ! Why, her mouth was just a thin, hard line and her eyes were like steel. She never looked in Lloyd Guiy's direction, but kept gazing straight ahead at the altar.

"Una—er—how do you do ?" said Lloyd Guiy in a stupid, muffled voice ; and then he gave such a miserable cough that I turned round towards him. He was looking so solemn, not a bit as he should have done at my wedding. I didn't like to see such a face at my wedding. I tapped him three or four times on the arm with my bouquet and shewed him my gold tooth. "Best man, best man !" I called out. The crowd were all around us staring and smiling, and every woman, I knew, feeling so envious, and looking at my beautiful wedding-dress. I was not a bit nervous ; you see, it was my second wedding.

"Best man," I called out. "Dreamy best man, and

dreamy miss bridesmaid. How quiet you are, both of you ; but we can see you, can't we, Ferdinand ? "

" You may wager your tall hats on that, Mrs. Roga, I mean Mrs. Fernandez—tchu—tchu—tchu—excuse—oh yes ! "

You see he was sneezing all the time. They wouldn't stop patting his back. And all this pepper and camphor was making every one so very excited. A slight breeze blew in through the church door, but nothing except a gale would have been enough to cool down all these surging people. I could see the perspiration pouring out of everybody. I myself was one big trickle, and squashed and suffocated like a little chicken under its mother. We had to force our way into the vestry, and there I was squashed and squeezed more than ever. Oh, my poor wedding-dress ! Oh, my poor everything ! You see, this was the time when everybody began kissing ; and they all began on me, except Ferdinand. He began on the clergyman. He said it was American fashion, but I could see that the clergyman didn't like it. However, every one was so excited that what the clergyman thought made no difference. Kiss, giggle, squeeze ; and Ferdinand, a gleam of hair oil and teeth and perspiration, darting to and fro.

" Oh, do stop patting his back," I cried out, panting. The sunlight was playing round that little room like a fire. The sunbeams came dancing in on us, thick with the dust that obscured the long, narrow, leaded window. Who could endure breathing pepper in such a hot-house ?

" Oh, I'm a promiscuous, I assure you," he shouted.

"In and out among the ladies like a prancing puppy-dog—tchu—tchu——"

"Come and stand next to me," I cried. "Stupid boy, quick. Where is Mr. Guiy? He has not signed the register yet. I want him to."

"Mr. Guiy, Mr. Guiy," shouted Ferdinand. But he was not in the vestry; and neither was he in the now empty church. He had slipped away unperceived. Such a sly thing to do, it seemed to me, going away like that.

Presently I found out why he had done so. It was all on account of that European girl, that shameless, flirting creature, that Miss Hamilton, as I discovered her name was. She must have heard that he was to be in church, I expect, and come down to get him away from us. I had gone by myself into the small room at the back, where the clergyman changes his clothes, and where there is a nice mirror, in order to take off my bridal veil and put on my beautiful ostrich-plumed hat. I stood looking at myself. Yes, in that hat I was beautiful and stately, in spite of my perspiration and torn wedding-dress. And then voices floated in through the open window, sounding all the time closer.

"Why do you come to me and make all these excuses? Do you think I mind whether you met me at the steamer or not? Do you think I mind?"

"Oh, don't talk like that to me. Be a little friendly."

It was Lloyd Guiy speaking to a woman. And then I recognised the hard, steely voice of the woman in the church.

"Friendly? You don't lack friends. All this wedding party," she said, so bitterly.

"They are acquaintances only. My being here at all is an accident."

"Don't be ashamed of them, please."

"I'm not!" There was a short silence. I could hear her quick breathing, so close was I to the window against which she stood.

"Good-bye, Mr. Guiy," she said, still in the same cool, hard tone.

"Una, don't treat me like this, be kind to me; you always were, be like your usual self. Everything I've told you is true, I swear it is. I explained all in my letter. You never answered it; why didn't you answer it? Why didn't you——part."

That was the last word I caught. She moved away, he following her, spurned like a dog. Oh, such a hard, cruel heart has she.

I was very angry that she should have dared to come down to my church on my wedding-day without any invitation, and run after my best man, making him unhappy. She had no invitation, I know she had not, and I do not mind what reports she spreads about. When she says that she received an invitation from Ferdinand, she speaks untruth. She never received one. How do I know? Because Ferdinand told me so. He has told me how she pestered him for an invitation, and I can well believe this, so forward and impertinent a woman is she. She was chasing Ferdinand about continually, and he had great difficulty in escaping her, and in refusing her requests, without being rude. Ferdinand, I am glad to say, was very strict and firm. He said that he was pleased that Mr. Guiy was at the ceremony, as he wanted all the

Europeans to know what a tip-top Eurasian wedding was like. But he did not want her. A mere nursemaid ! I should think not !

Ferdinand has a very proud spirit and does not like nursemaids, deeming himself above them. The males of the Fernandez family, like those of my late husband's, are very proud. I must confess also that there was little else but family pride at the wedding breakfast at the Grotto. And I felt hot and tired. So presently I came away, driving in my carriage through the blazing afternoon sunlight, with Ferdinand beside me.

CHAPTER XIII

“ **B**E quiet, stupid boy ; see, the coachman observes you.”

“ His front is looking at the landscape.”

“ Be quiet. Remember our bargain ; remember you married me for a home ! ”

We drove by a roundabout way to the hotel, passing along green lanes cut through the forest, lanes where the carriage wheels ran silent over velvet turf and the air was crystal cool ; and then onwards, into the rubber plantations, to the estate of the Pawkers, where Ferdinand showed me the ditches he was digging, and the bungalow in which resided that pestering Miss Hamilton.

It was a small and very wretched bungalow. I pity the people who live in such bungalows ; I pity the people who have to spend their lives in the midst of bare, ugly, red clearings, in the middle of the forest and rubber trees, without society or comfort of any sort. The mosquitoes on that estate are dreadful, terrible. They attacked me, even in broad daylight, darting out in shoals from their lurking places under the broad leaves of the rubber trees, and biting my wrists and ankles. And there was such a dry, murderous heat. Not a breath, not a stirring of a leaf. What a place to live in !

The coolies working at the ditches seemed glad I had

come to visit them on my wedding-day. They gathered round smiling and chattering like apes. I gave them money ; and then we got into our carriage and drove straight on to the hotel.

That was all our honeymoon, that drive, for I could not leave my business just then, and, besides that, this marriage I had made was nothing to do with love and honeymoons.

Ferdinand plainly enough still thought it was, but I was determined to alter his thoughts. Never, believe me, was I other to him than cold and distant.

"Be quiet, stupid boy, or I shall become angry with you. Have you no shame, or consideration for the presence of the coachman ? Do not attempt to touch me." Never once had I allowed him to kiss or embrace me, except publicly at the wedding in common with every one else.

"Oh, Lolina, don't be a mere missis to me any longer ! Don't tell me that I have been married to a cold-blooded fish !"

"Get off your knees !" I reply coldly. "Sit down on the opposite seat and behave yourself. Listen to that !"

"What ?"

It was a carriage, coming rapidly towards us. I recognised the Government uniforms, the Government horses, and pulled myself together for the ordeal.

He was in the carriage alone, looking straight ahead of him, so I saw as we drew near, affecting not to perceive us, although the narrowness of the lane made both our coachmen pull in their horses and drive with care. His stern, drawn face betrayed him. As we

passed, our horses trotting slowly, I hurled my crushed wedding bouquet at his feet.

Ferdinand, seemingly frightened at this unexpected encounter, had cowered behind my skirts, for the moment forgotten. I sat dazed until his touch recalled me to reality. I saw him still kneeling there, looking up into my face, half timidly, half impudently. Oh, miserable me ! What had I done, what had I done !

"Get up and sit there on the seat as I told you to," I said, and my tone and looks scared him into instant obedience.

We exchanged scarcely another word until we arrived at the hotel.

And now comes a part of my narrative when I must halt for a moment in order to ask myself what sort of impression has my personality as I have revealed it made on my readers. Have I painted a portrait of a charming person, innocent and beautiful and womanly, capable of loving strongly, capable of inspiring a violent passion, and much ill-used by Fate ? If I have done this, then I shall have the sympathy of every one of my own sex, which is hard to earn. And they alone in any case will understand the full cruelty of my position on this my wedding evening, alone in my hotel with a pestering bridegroom, a boy bridegroom whom never for a moment had I loved, whilst my thoughts, all my thoughts, were dwelling continually on that other whose acquaintance had brought me so much joy and so much misery.

I had done wrong : I had made a mistake. All in a moment of angry madness had I made a mistake, and

as a result I had got this young bridegroom. I had got him, as you say in your language, "for keeps"! Oh, what a bridegroom! So thin, and so important! And he still smelt of pepper.

"Ferdinand, now we are married you shall have a bath in the nice bathroom attached to your bedroom. We must begin our married life well!"

"I thought of beginning it with a large bottle of beer; my inside needs bathing," he demurred, rather sulkily. "I want to stay in the bar room here beside you."

You see I had already started my work again. All day one of the native servants had been serving the customers; but I could not trust this man for too long. Besides, I wanted to make occupation for myself, to keep out miserable thoughts.

Ferdinand had his bottle of beer, standing on the customers' side of the bar. It was our wedding-day, and he was streaming with the heat that comes in through the open windows every afternoon. I could not refuse him this beer. "To-morrow I will be stricter," I said to myself.

Later on we had tea together in the little room at the back of the bar. Customers had been few that afternoon. Perhaps, in their delicacy, they thought that our wedding evening ought to be undisturbed by the popping of their lemonade bottles and their commonplace comments on the affairs of every day.

I thank those of them who held these motives, and may tell them that their kindness was only cruelty. I should have been happier by far that afternoon if they had come as usual, happier by far walking up and

down behind the counter, even perhaps under the fire of the respectful chaff with which a bride may expect to be greeted. I should have known how to prevent them from being otherwise than respectful. How? Try me and see.

But with this new husband, alone, and he as persistent as a hungry mosquito! I was unhappy; I was angry.

"Be still, stupid boy; I put out my hand for another piece of toast, not to shake hands with you!"

"Oh, Lolina, let me be your toast: bite me with that sweet mouth; don't leave me upon the rack."

"I'll leave you on the doorstep if you don't be quiet, you stupid boy. Remember our bargain. We are nothing more than friends, and may easily be less. I married you for your high name. You married me for a home."

"Oh no-a, no-a," he said so piteously. "Can't you see how I am pining away? I shall become a mere skeleton, a death rattle, an early graver. Oh, kick me, hit me, anything, but don't go breaking my heart like a pair of nut-crackers. Oh, dear me!"

Such a miserable face as he had, and his hands were clasped and trembling. I could not help feeling sorry for him. You see, it was not his fault that he married me. It was not his fault that he loved me so.

"Don't talk like this, you stupid fellow," I said, patting him on the shoulder. "You know I don't care for you but as a friend. You're only a little boy. I'm old enough to be your mother. Come, look happy and drink another cup of tea."

Oh yes, I was very patient with him, longing often

to box his ears, but restraining myself. And at least I managed to stop him from breaking into another fit of howling, and got him to talk quietly and sensibly almost as if to his mother. But at dinner he began to make love to me again. I had to order him to refrain from treading on my foot under the table.

"You would let this Baylers tread on your foot, missis," he cried in a passion. "Oh, miserable blighter that I am."

"I would let nobody tread on my foot," I answered stiffly. "Come, come, you're not miserable. You have a nice home. You have married me, and now I can marry no one else. And perhaps, one day, who knows? if you work hard enough you may earn my love. But now is too early to talk of such things."

"Oh, may I hope? May I hope to be a real husband and not a mere imitation?"

"Yes, you may hope," I replied hesitatingly, I was so sorry for him. "Perhaps in years to come you may win my love."

"Make it weeks, darling, darling Lolina," he cried, springing from his seat and throwing himself on the ground at my side. "Make it days and hours and minutes. See, I am grovelling like a forsaken guinea-pig. See, I clutch the hem of your garment."

"Get up, you stupid boy; the servant is coming with the pudding. Get up. Talk no more of this nonsense or I shall hate you. Have you no shame or respect? Get up at once or I shall leave the room."

He heard the servant coming along the passage, and jumped back to his seat again instantly; but he was too late. The servant had seen him and, oh, shame to

me ! was grinning all over his yellow face. He did not even pretend ignorance, so open had our behaviour seemed to his Chinese mind.

" Oh, the blushes that you cause me to make," I muttered. " What will they say in the kitchen ? "

" Boy," said Ferdinand to the servant in Malay, " if you find a diamond stud on the floor when you sweep to-morrow, return to me." You see, he was acting, but he could not deceive the servant. These Chinamen are not simpletons. The stupid boy !

He liked the pudding so much. I could see he was not used to good food ; and then he finished his lemonade, sipping and swallowing just like a chicken. What a thin neck he had !

" Ferdinand ! " I said.

" Yes, darling Lolina ? "

" Don't call me darling ; tell me instead why your mother calls you Hopping Bird."

" I don't want to talk about that now. I want to talk about love."

" But you must tell me," I insisted. " I must know everything about you, now we are married."

He looked so uneasy and guilty, as if he had a secret he was ashamed of. His face grew quite red under the dark skin. I thought from his obvious discomfort that the secret was something indelicate. He said :

" Mother's always calling me names."

So, she was. I remembered her remark at the wedding.

" She said you were a foundling pauper. She said she was not your mother. She said I was to ask you what she meant."

"She has told you everything! Oh, miserable orphan!"

"She has told me nothing except that," I cried, surprised to see him so upset. "You must tell me more. I want to know."

He sat there with his face buried in his hands, never saying a word, although I questioned him again, and even poked him with my hand in order to make him answer me. And so at last I got up from the table in a very angry state. He had a secret, and he would not tell it me on this our wedding-day.

"Goodnight," I called out, sweeping from the room. I still had my wedding-dress on and looked very pretty. "You say you love me and you won't even tell me why your mother calls you Hopping Bird. Pah! I spit on such love!"

"Oh, Lolina! Oh, Lolina! O-o-o-oh!"

Even now I can recall my last view of him as I left the room. The shutters were open to the darkness. A warm breeze blew in. The white-walled room was aglow with flickering light shed by the lamp that hung suspended over the untidy dining-table. And there he was in his white suit, down on my new green matting, with his hands clasped on high, with oily love-locks tumbling about his forehead, with agony writ large on his dark face.

Oh, Ferdinand, Ferdinand, stupid boy, to be so overcome by beauty, to be so overcome with love!

I turned my back contemptuously on his wailings, and entered my bedroom, fastening the flimsy canvas door behind me.

And now at last I was able to cease the watching and

the strain, to relax my guard, and give myself up to thoughts and recollections born out of that eventful day. How bitter these thoughts were ! What had I gone and married this little bit of a thin stick for ? I don't know. They say in your country, "Take a hair of the dog that bit you." I felt that evening that I would gladly have exchanged Ferdinand for a single hair of Baylers.

Oh, such a grand, fine man was my love then, so cunning and clever, able to beat any man in Sudora either by strength or craft. But he could not beat me. No, rather than surrender to him, I had, yes, I had ruined my life, cut myself off from him for ever. That was what his face, when we passed him in the carriage, had meant. "You are no more to me : I have forgotten you. Even if it kills me, I will forget you." That was what it had meant, that hard, drawn face. Suffering still he was then, I knew for me. Suffering more perhaps to-night. Smelling my bouquet that I had hurled at him, perhaps. Throwing it from the window into the darkness and the thought of me with it for ever. Staring out after it.

"Perhaps better so. Ah, well !" I too flung open my shutters. I too looked out into the dim night with my long hair flowing about my shoulders, cooling my hot face in the breeze.

Presently I left the window and, taking off my wedding-dress, put on a loose white gown, and brushed and plaited my hair.

Perhaps he too was brushing his hair at that moment ! Perhaps he too, when he had thrown aside the brush with a weary gesture, had laid himself down on his

long chair under the shaded lamp, heavy-eyed, sorrowful, dreaming, yes, dreaming—dreaming hour after hour——

“Lo-li-na ! Lo-li-na !”

I started up from my dreaming. What was it, this noise ? I felt alarmed, but I was half dreaming still.

“Lolina ! Lolina ! Lolina ! Lolina !” The voice shewed irritation now. The canvas door was shaken violently. I jumped up and ran towards the door exclaiming : “What is it ? What is it ?”

“Am I to sit here gnashing my teeth all night ?”

“Go away, you wicked boy !” I said. “Go away, Ferdinand ! How dare you ! What are you doing outside my door at this hour ?”

“You are always wanting explanations. I find it extremely irritating. If you must know, I wish to borrow a long bootlace to use in being a suicider. Oh, miserable blighter that I am ! And my ambition was to be a happy bridegroom ! Great Scott and Dickens !”

“Go away at once,” I said, becoming more collected. “I am ashamed of you. If I had known you intended to behave like this in a respectable hotel, I certainly would never have married you.”

“Oh, Lolina, g-u-u-r-r-r-r-rr. Hear my teeth gnashing ! Hear my bones rattling ! Hear the wind whistling, whistling about my nethers. Am I a monstrosity ? No, I am the customary happy bridegroom. And yet you insist on treating me as a mere outside-the-door. O-o-oh, Lolina !” He began to shake the door again.

“Stop all this,” I said, very sharply. “Remember our bargain. Go off to bed at once, or I shall think I

have married a Kling, whose word is not to be trusted."

"I don't want to go to bed. I want to talk about love! Oh, Lolina, coco-nut-hearted Lolina! My inflamed eye is here at the keyhole. My breath comes in spasms."

"Be off, you little beast," I shouted, moving aside. "You are making me angry! You are driving me into a perspiration!"

"Come and perspire in my arms."

"Be off!"

"I won't. Give me a good-night kiss, Lolina, or down goes the door! All right then, missis! Perish all policemen! Love laughs at locksmiths!"

Bang! Bang! He was trying to burst in. The whole flimsy partition shook under his assaults. I put my weight against the door, resisting with all my strength.

"Oh yes! Oh yes! I am a perfect devil! Oh, Lolina! I want my good-night kiss, or else a boot-lace. Oh yes! Oh yes! Oh yes!" His cries rang through the silence. How strong he was for such a thin, thin fellow!

"I hate you! I spit on you! I despise you! Go away!" I shouted, pushing, struggling.

The bolt was bending but still it held. The canvas panels of the door were tearing, they were tearing. His brown stick-like arm came through, pushing me away. What was that amulet bound on it above the elbow? That weird silver-circled charm?

"Ferdinand!" I shrieked, beside myself. "Stop! For your life, stop!"

"Oh no, Lolina. I won't stop. Not for five hundred policemen. And I will cold-shoulder all your magistrates. Show me this Baylers and I will bite him. Yes, I will. Oh yes! Oh yes! Oh yes!"

"Ferdinand," I screamed. The door was giving. He had drawn the bolt. He was stronger than I.

"Ferdinand!" I shrieked, suddenly inspired. "What would the barmaid at Willie's say if she saw you now?"

"I don't care. I don't care."

But he did, yes, he did! He was pressing less vigorously at the door.

"Never shall you be allowed into Willie's," I panted, gaining courage. "I will write to the barmaid to-morrow morning, and, for my sake, she will refuse to serve you when you go to London. I will write many letters. I will hold you up to the scorn of every hotel-keeper in London. They will stand at the doors of their hotels, flipping at you scornfully with their aprons as you walk along the Strand. That is what I will do if you don't stop. I have the power over all these hotel-keepers. I am a hotel-keeper too!"

"I won't stop," he said again. But already he had ceased pushing at the door.

"You must stop; you must listen to what I say. It's very important, so important that I am now going to put on my dress and come into the dining-room to talk to you. Ferdinand, you don't know what you are doing. Ferdinand, it is urgent. Go to the dining-room. I will come at once."

Something in my tones seemed to have chilled him. But he was still suspicious.

"You swear you are not deceiving me?" he asked in a cold, trembling voice.

"I swear."

"Say after me, 'If I am deceiving F. Fernandez may I always be considered a pretty fair tick.'"

I complied with his request. I would have sworn anything! Only to get him to the dining-room! Only to meet him face to face, to interrogate him, to confirm my terrible suspicion.

After hesitating a little, he walked slowly away.

CHAPTER XIV

WHAT remains in my memory of that interview concerns almost entirely my speeches to him, his replies, his astonishment. How I fastened my dress in my bedroom, whether I looked at my reflection in the glass before departing for the dining-room, I cannot say. But I can form a picture of a tragic figure draped untidily in white satin, with masses of dark hair coiled about her head, that stole, lamp in hand, along the passages. My mind is haunted still by a pale, drawn, horror-struck face.

"Tell me who you are," I cried on entering the room.

He turned and came running towards me, holding out his arms. "Oh, Lolina, I am your puppy-dog."

"No, no. Who are you? What is your true name? How came you to Sudora?"

"My true name——" He stopped, looking stupidly at me. "Oh, I don't want to talk about names, I——"

"Don't play. This is no play; this is no time for talking of love," I cried. "That amulet on your arm. Shew it to me, I insist."

I saw him shrinking back, and caught him. "Here, on this right arm of yours," I cried, pushing back the sleeve of his jacket. I pulled him under the lamp. "Yes, it is! Oh! Oh! Tell me how you got it," I screamed.

He seemed dazed, unable to answer me.

"Your mother says you are a foundling. I did not believe her, but I do believe her now. Was this amulet on your arm when you were found as an infant? Tell me! Tell me!"

I had almost to shake the answer out of him. At last he nodded.

"Tell me this, also," I cried in a frenzy. "There were strange natives in the town when you were found? I know there were. Did you hear about them from your father?"

Another nod,

"And did your father seek them afterwards? He did, yes, of course, he did, not wanting to be burdened with you. But he could not find them. How could he expect to find such wily ones as they? And one of these natives was very tall, with a face all small-pox-pitted? Do I speak the truth or not? No need for you to nod your head, you boy! It is true, and I can see it all. Everything grows clear. Ah, stupid me that I should not have recognised your face, the face of your father."

"My father! What's this? You knew him? Great Scott and Dickens!"

"Yes, yes, I did; and your mother too. So well I knew your dear mother. Oh, you poor boy, you poor boy! You are no longer my husband, Ferdinand, I must tell you that at once. You are something very different. Oh, this is dreadful."

"Not your husband, Lolina?" he cried in astonishment. "How do you make that out when we were married only yesterday? This is getting absurd. It's getting irritating. I don't know where I am with

all my relations ! I thought I had secured something in the way of another relation by this wedding, and now you seem to say that I haven't—in spite of the marriage certificate ! Oh, Lolina, I don't believe these excuses. You want to thwart me all the time. You are Mrs. F. Fernandez, you are, you are. I will wager my tall hats on that."

" I am not ! "

" What are you then ? "

" I am your AUNT ! "

" My aunt ! Goo—goo— Oh, damnable impossibility ! "

" I am your aunt, I say." I told him gently. " Listen, Ferdinand, control yourself, sit down, be calm, don't bite the tablecloth."

" How can I be calm, missis ? I'm in the middle of a whirlpool ! I lost my way in it ! My mother isn't my mother, my father has his double, my sister is a substantial unreality, and now you tell me that my wife is my aunt ! And what am I, tell me that ? Dusted, found under a bed, a mere makeweight ! What becomes of the honourable traditions of my old family when I haven't got one ? Where is my perfect respectability ? Where is it ? Where is it, missis ? All gone at one blow ! Where is it ? Give it to me back ! "

He was on his feet now, whirling to and fro in a frenzy, arms waving, eyes rolling, uncouth noises issuing from his mouth. And then he went and deliberately banged his head against the wall, just as natives do when on the verge of madness and *amok*.

" Ferdinand ! Ferdinand ! " I shrieked, running up

and trying to drag him away. Oh, I was frightened about him then ! " Are we Muruts, are we Dyaks, that we should behave thus ? Oh no ! Pull yourself together ! Prove that you are to be relied on in an emergency ! Show yourself the cool man of the world that we know you are ! Think of the barmaid at Willie's, the barmaid at Willie's who still respects you."

" What am I now ? A mere second-hander ! Shop-soiled for ever ! "

" No, Ferdinand, you are nothing of the sort," I said, oh, so soothingly. " You are free. Our marriage is no marriage. You can look the richest maiden in the land straight in the face and ask her to be yours ! "

" I shall be their laughstock ! " he cried bitterly.

Presently he grew calmer. I led him to a seat.

" No, no, Ferdinand. If we play our cards right, we shall be nobody's laughstocks," I replied. I sat beside him and patted his shoulder. " Don't you know, mistakes like this happen every day in London ? "

" Oh yes, I know tha-at very well," he replied hastily. " But I don't like it in Sudora. Every one is acquainted with you in these small jungly places, and you quickly become their laughstock. Oh dear me ! Are you conspicuously certain of your auntship, Mrs. Roga ? "

" I am quite sure," I returned. " I was with my sister when you were born in Pelung. We had run away from the white man who was thought to be your father, run away with Ahmat the groom. They were not sure of your parentage. So they named you Jereboam bin Jereboam."

" They named me what ? " he cried, starting up.

"Jereboam bin Jereboam."

"Oh, miserable blighter ! Oh, miserable blighter !"
He sank back as if overcome. His head dropped on his breast. How still he was !

"Ferdinand ! Ferdinand !"

"This is a bitter pill, missis," he muttered huskily.
"It will take a damnable long time to get the taste of this pill out of my mouth, I assure you. Jereboam ! Oh, my hats ! And but a short month since—ahoo ! aho !"

"Ferdinand, Ferdinand ! Control yourself. No one shall ever know it. It shall be a secret betwixt you and me, like your parentage, like the amulet that I myself fastened on your infant arm. Like that big red birthmark which——"

"You know about my birthmark ! Oh ! Oh !"

"No one else does ! No one ever shall through me. I shall never tell anyone at all about such a disfigurement, you may be sure. Come, Ferdinand, be a man !"

"But you know, you know my shameful secrets. Oh, what a laughstock you must think me."

"No, no !"

"Yes, yes ! This is another pill. I am getting tired of these pills !" He jumped up and faced me. Excitement had seized him again. Already the whites of his eyes were prominent. His thin fingers twisted and untwisted. "What shall we do ?" he cried.

"Let everything be a secret," I said after a moment's thought. "Tell nobody. You must leave the hotel now and until the right time comes let us never make public the fact that we are related, that we are not

husband and wife. Then you will not be a laughstock and neither shall I."

"What? I don't understand!"

"Don't tell anyone about our marriage being not a marriage. Remember too that the English Government will at once put in prison a man who marries his aunt," I said emphatically. "Let everybody think we are married, and that we have quarrelled bitterly and so do not live in the same house. And then there will be no danger. This is frequently done in London."

"Oh yes, of course, I know that."

"Everybody will be sorry for you. All the rich young ladies here in Sudora will feel so sorry. They will say that it is my fault. And be sure I shall tell them nothing about your birthmark."

"But where have I got to sleep at night?" he asked, still rather stupidly. "I shan't have any home. Mother won't have me back at the Grotto. She told me after the wedding yesterday that if you had not taken me away she would have called in the scavengers. Oh, miserable blighter! Jereboam! Oh, my hats!"

"I will write a letter now for you to take to her," I said. "I will promise to send you money. I will implore her to take you back."

I sent him to his bedroom, where he packed up his few possessions. I gave him presents, I gave him money. I held the lamp whilst he tied up his small bundle. And then in the dining-room I wrote the letter to his so-called mother. The elasticity of his temperament now came to his rescue. He behaved actually as though a load had been removed from his mind.

Perhaps he was only acting. He must have felt the wrench of parting, for on his side had been the love brought to our marriage. Finding I was his aunt must have killed this love and brought affection. Yes, that was it: that explained his growing cheerfulness. Affection is a merrier passion than love.

I had called a servant to carry his bundle. We now went into the bar room and said good-bye.

I took his hand, such a thin hand. "Ferdinand," I said, "I like you very much as a nephew. As a husband you would have been a mistake."

"Oh, I'm a top-hole nephew, you may wager your tall hats on that," he cried, laughing. "And one of these days I am coming back to live with my lovely aunt. I'm in a state of merry bachelorhood again now. What! What!"

We did not shake hands in front of the servants. We had agreed not to do so, as we wished to publish our quarrel to the world through them and by any other means. I even went so far as to shout some angry epithet after him in Malay. He replied with interest.

And then the swinging hurricane lamp which he bore was raised and waved vigorously in farewell, showing him, with the lightly laden man beside him, standing facing me just where the road turns.

I received a letter from him later in the day to say that he was safely installed in the Grotto once more. He gave no account of how the Fernandez family received him. I for my part had other things to think about.

The strain of that night left its mark on me. My days were dull and drowsy. The nights brought no

refreshment. Often I felt thankful that our attempt at marriage had ended as it did, just as often disturbed because I had not managed to bar the door against temptation.

And I had much time for thought. My business was not prosperous. Rather, for some mysterious reason, trade grew less. Ferdinand, of course, no longer came to the hotel. Ships are few at that season of the year in Sudora. And, strangely enough, my connection among people employed by the Government seemed to have fallen off altogether since my wedding-day.

Yes, I had plenty of time for brooding, for thinking of Baylers, my grand lover, for making plans about how I should act if he forgave me and came and spoke to me again.

CHAPTER XV

FERDINAND'S feelings of satisfaction with himself and good will to all rich heiresses manifested by his vigorous swinging of the lantern in farewell must have been very transient. A policeman who passed him on his way to the Grotto commented afterwards on his appearance.

"*Saperti orang sakit!*" said the policeman. "Like a sick man; his head sought the earth, his shoulders rounded as a pomegranate, his whole body limp, his very topee set at an angle of extreme misery, the lamp hanging in his lifeless hand, shedding a pallid light. I approached, saying to his follower: 'Here have we surely a person under the influence of opium. Can I assist?'"

"But the fellow waved me back, replying: 'Heed him not, oh policeman! No earthly medicine will serve his turn. He is a victim of the love sickness that attacks the strongest of us men. We rely at this juncture on the Prophet Mahomet.'

"'And does he now pray?' I inquired, hearing words on the lips of the sick one.

"'Presently he will do so,' replied the servant. 'Just now he accuses himself in his own language of being for ever accursed.' The English language I did not understand, but the words the sick man uttered sounded like 'Omiserableblighter! Omiserable-

blighter ! ' An evil spirit evidently possessed him and therefore I passed on, wishing him well."

Whether due to the policeman's good wishes or to the spur of necessity, certain it is that as Ferdinand neared the bungalow he pulled himself together and walked with a firmer step. The time was the dark hour preceding the dawn. The way was unlighted, rough, and winding. The lamp went out and, after that, the servant, so he confessed afterwards, himself grew uneasy, fearing ghosts. They had to pass a graveyard full of these ghosts. They saw them dodging about among the glimmering tombstones. The servant wanted to turn back, but Ferdinand clutched him and would not allow him to do so : together hand-in-hand they sprinted for safety. They reached the entrance to the garden of the Grotto, and there Ferdinand, taking the bundle, dismissed him, and he made his way to the hut of a friend, where he abided until the sun was up.

Was it a painful consciousness of impending trouble, a dislike to washing the dirty linen of the Fernandez family in public, that compelled Ferdinand to dismiss the man so peremptorily ? Ordinarily he was only too willing to repay any little attentions from those of the servant class by making them free of the Grotto cook-house. But then, ordinarily, he would have walked along the path with a buoyant step and taken the bungalow entrance stairs two at a time. Now he hesitated, leaning upon the half-open garden gate, his head upon his hands. Plainly he was troubled inwardly. A moan escaped him.

Presently he pulled himself together and crawled

slowly towards the bungalow. It was still in total darkness, not a glimmer of light visible, even in the cookhouse; and the silence seemed terrible. The dogs, the chickens, the very insects were asleep.

The broad stairs creaked as he ascended them. Through the drawn and fastened chinks he saw into the blackness of the veranda. He tried the door, faintly hoping, and found it bolted more securely even than was customary. Then after a pause of hesitation, after a deep sigh, he knocked gently.

No answer from within the bungalow, but the old rooster in the fowl-house heard him and gave a cackle of surprise and indignation. He gave another knock, followed by others, each louder and more desperate. The fowl-house was alarmed. A door within the bungalow clicked open. Somebody in slippers shuffled on to the veranda.

"Mother!" he whispered. "Mother!"

"Who is it?" asked Mrs. Fernandez angrily in Malay. "Go away at once and come again in the morning, whoever you are. Is it something about business? Mr. Fernandez is asleep. Mr. Ferdinand is up at the hotel."

"He is not, oh, miserable blighter! He is not," cried Ferdinand in low, wretched tones. "Mother," he went on eagerly, "doan't you know me? I'm sitting on your doorstep. I come back to the bosom of my family! I'm a sort of fat-headed calf come back to be killed! Oh dear me!"

"What!" He heard her shuffle quickly towards the door and rose in order to enter directly she drew back the bolts. But she made no movement to admit

him; only bent down and said: "What do you want? What do you mean, coming down here now? Do you want to be a great big scandal? Go back, quick, quick!"

"But I can't go back! She's all one big quarrel! Just as you told me she would be, mother. I've come home. I want a little peace!"

"You go away before it gets light and the neighbours see," hissed the old lady. "I've had enough disgrace from you. Don't go trying on any more of your foolish tricks, Ferdinand. You go back. I warned you what she was. You've made your bed and you've got to lie on it."

"I haven't made my bed!" wailed Ferdinand. "I thought I was making it, I thought I was, but I was only making a hash." He grasped the handle and shook the door. "Let me in, mother, let me in! I can scarcely breathe for misery. I've been deceived all ends up. Everywhere I look I get deceived—Ahoo! Ahoo!"

"Go away, you great, big, blubbering baby," hissed the old lady indignantly. "I've lost all patience with you. Don't come near here any more. All my life I've been worried with you, getting you your milk and your clothes and your boots and socks, down to your wife, and now you are not satisfied."

"She isn't a wife! She's one big impossibility! You don't unnerstand!"

"Oh yes, I do. I know. You're tired of her already. You rotten, fickle, disgusting thing! You coolie! But we're tired of you round here. We don't want you! You're nothing to us round here. I wish

I'd left you in that bag of rice, ungrateful reptile that you are! Disgracing us before everybody! I'll take a rattan to you! Go away!"

He heard her retreat across the veranda, and the door slam viciously. He was alone—ahoo—ahoo!—an outcast—ahoo—ahoo—ahoo!

He crawled stupidly down the steps, carrying his bundle with him, and stumbling blindly along. Now and then bitter sobs escaped him. At the side of the house he felt soft turf underfoot, and flung himself down, burying his head on his arms, surrendering utterly to grief.

After a while he dozed. Exhaustion, youth, every sob brought sleep the nearer. The dawn came and presently the sun, warming his chilled body, drying the tears on his stained cheeks. Golden light, shining through the bushes under which he lay on his back, half concealed, formed a leafy pattern on his soiled white suit. His topee had rolled a yard or so away. Green grass stains showed in smudges on the white crown, matching the green lining and the trees. The flowers were out, bees were humming. The very air was alive with joy and the morning. Presently he too began to waken. His eyes half opened, he stretched a leg stiffly, he stretched his arms.

The bungalow stood near him, looking very like a weather-beaten packing case. In its blank wall a shutter swung open. Amy, still in her modest night attire of white baju and flowered silk sarong, looked out.

It was the sight of her round, dark, honest face, with the glossy black hair lying loose about it, that stirred him into complete wakefulness. His expression

changed. He opened his mouth as if to greet her, shut it again and, sitting up, watched her as she gazed around. She rejoiced in the warm, fresh sunshine, that was evident enough. He could see her bosom rising and falling under its white covering as she breathed deep of the pure air, he could see her dilated nostrils, her innocent, happy smile. Plainly the loss of him had not disturbed her slumbers; there were not even shadows under her eyes; never was to be seen a more contented expression. And this girl his mother had always insinuated would die of grief when he married Mrs. Roga. Why, she was not dying of grief at all! Tears stole to his eyes. His mouth opened.

"O-o-o-oh, miserable——" he was beginning, but before the sound came she disappeared, leaving him without an audience. He shut his mouth again, and moving to his knees waited, looking at the empty window. There was an air of expectancy about his whole bedraggled figure. He seemed to know that she would return.

When she did, she carried a glass and toothbrush. Leaning out of the window she began to brush her teeth. He stretched out his arms imploringly, but she, engrossed in her task, looked on to the ground or the other way. Her loose sleeve flapped airily. Her yellow, swiftly working arm showed curved and beautiful.

"O-o-oh, miserable blighter! ahoo—ahoo—ahoo!"

"Oh!" screamed Amy faintly. She hastily withdrew the brush.

On his knees and with arms still outstretched he moved into the open.

"Ferdinand!" she exclaimed. "Oh!" She regarded him with eyes that expressed alarm, almost horror. "But you mustn't come here, Ferdinand, now," she went on in an agitated way. "Mother says you mustn't, except as a visitor."

"I want to be a visitor, Amy. I want to be a constant visitor."

"But Ferdinand, you're married now," said Amy, shaking her head sagely. "Your place is the home, the home you have made for yourself at that hotel. Mother said so last night. You woke us all up last night. We wanted to come out on to the veranda and see you, but mother wouldn't let us. She is angry with you, Ferdinand. She says you have made your bed and you must lie on it."

"But how can I lie on it? Oh, Amy, oh, oh!" He sprang up and advanced to the window, supplicating. "Amy," he went on in a whisper, "can you lie on a bed when you find a wasp's nest in the mattress? Oh, Amy, I'm being stinged to pieces by ten thousand wasps. They have collared me, knowing I'm an orphan. And all the time they've been stinging at me I never forgot you, Amy. I was led astray by the wicked, Amy, oah yess, I assure you. I thought you were too good and beautiful for me, Amy. But I am of an affectionate disposition, Amy."

"Oh, go away, Ferdinand," whispered Amy, blushing faintly.

"But where can I go? Look at me; homeless am I, like a mildewed cat."

"I'll speak to mother. Come back, to-morrow perhaps."

"Make it now. Now. Snatch me before breakfast, Amy, my preserver," he cried, reaching up and grasping her outstretched arm. "Oh, darling hand, hand of a sister that might have been changed into a more satisfactory if I had not allowed its dangling to go unperceived. Oh, Amy, once I was your superior; now I am become your puppy-dog. See, I lick your hand, I fondle it like twenty brothers. Oah, Amy, let us go together to mother and ask her forgiveness. If you come with me she will let me stay."

"But I can't. Oh, I am sorry for you, Ferdinand," whispered Amy. She began to sob. "But what is the matter between you and your bride? I don't unnerstand."

"Amy, Amy, I wish to let bygones be bygones. I want to let Mrs. Roga be a bygone."

"But you can't, ahoo—ahoo!—she's Mrs. Fernandez—ahoo—ahoo——"

"She's not, Amy. She's a skeleton in my cupboard, ahoo!—yess—oh, miserable blighter! ahoo—ahoo——"

Engaged thus, Mr. and Mrs. Fernandez, paying an early and unaccustomed visit to the garden, came round the corner of the bungalow and discovered them. In an instant Ferdinand found himself sprawling on his back. The old lady stood over him. She would have struck him again had not her husband held her back. He had to keep a grip of her arm still, clinging to the sleeve of the white linen wrapper she was wearing, imploring her to take things easily.

"Take things as they come," he said, frantically trying to soothe her. "Don't get excited. Nobody's

had any sleep to-night. It will be all the same in a hundred years afterwards."

"You see this villain making love to our daughter and you say that!" she screamed, trying to break away.

"He wasn't, mother, indeed," cried Amy passionately. "He was only saying how sorry he was feeling."

"O-o-oh, miserable blighter!"

"Don't you dare to speak to me, you wretched," went on the old lady in her shrillest tones. "Don't you come here, you disgrace."

"I'm not a disgrace. I'm only a visitor, mother," cried Ferdinand in a loud, piteous voice.

"Be off, be off, I say." She broke from her husband's clutches and, seizing a bamboo sapling that lay on the ground close by, belaboured the unfortunate bridegroom vigorously. "Get out of my house!" she shouted. "Off, off, scum of the ground, deceitful, false vermin, away with you, away."

When her husband approached to prevent her she struck at him too. Her grey hair had become unpinned and waved about her massive shoulders. Her stout, sallow face was red and streaming. The howls of the unhappy Ferdinand filled the morning air. Along the sunlit hedge heads of neighbours were already visible. They grew in numbers as the noise continued. The fowls, the birds, the very squirrels in the coco-nut trees, cluttered in alarm.

"There!" she panted at last, flinging aside the broken bamboo. "There! I feel better now, Mr. Fernandez, better than I have felt for a month. I have

been wanting to get at him now for a month, the nasty, conceited young wretch that he is—oh dear me, my breath—with his socks and his ladies and his Mrs. Roga and his Miss Hamilton and his looking down on all of us here! I never had such puttings up to contend with—sneering at my Amy, if you please. And all because you didn't want to quarrel with him for the sake of your business, Mr. Fernandez. Blow your business, mister——”

“But you were fond of him too,” expostulated the old man eagerly. “Remember Bird-in-Hand, mother.”

“That was long ago,” said Mrs. Fernandez, gesticulating. “When he was a little boy, with no clothes on at all. Now he thinks he's a man—look at him, squirming there on the ground—and talks big always about London, and wants to be ashamed of us all. Oh yess! You skimpy little wretch!”

“I never did! I'm not ashamed of anything!” howled Ferdinand miserably between his sobs. “I won't talk about London any more. I assure you, mother! I don't want to wear any more socks. My heart's broken, that's what it is!” He got on his knees and then sat grovelling before her.

“Forgive him, mother,” wept Amy. “He is unhappy with her he has married. He doesn't want to see her any more.”

“She's a bygone,” Ferdinand cried. “I dislike her with my utmost energy. She's finished like yesterday's breakfast. I swear it. All gone. Oh, mother, I want to stay at home and turn over a new leaf in comfort. Forgive me.”

"Yess, Mr. Ferdinand," said the old lady contemptuously, in response to this frantic appeal. "You think I believe this? We called you Hopping Bird. That's what you are. You will come back here and then in a day or two this woman, your wife, will lift her little finger, and off you hop to her. Oh no! I want nothing of this business. He must come to live in the Grotto no more."

"But she hates me too. She will never lift her finger any more," said Ferdinand wildly. "Oh, mother, trust me. She hates us all. Oah yess! You don't believe?" he went on, seeing the old lady shake her head. "Trust me, oh, do! How can it be proved? Bless us all, yes. Her letter that she gave me for you. I forgot her. Here! Here!"

He snatched the envelope, now all wet and creased, from his pocket, and gave it to Mr. Fernandez, who opened it and, putting on his eye-glasses, read the contents.

"I didn't know the woman had sent me a letter! What does she say?" asked the old lady, quivering. "Such a writing," she added, looking over his shoulder. "Though I'm no scholar I can see she's not."

"I'd better read it inside the bungalow. There are so many people looking at us," answered Mr. Fernandez with a puzzled air. "It's a very funny letter. She says," he continued, whispering in his wife's ear, "that she saw something on Ferdinand's body that absolutely disgusted her with him, and that she never wants to see him again. It's a long letter. So extraordinary!"

"She must mean his birthmark," muttered the old

lady, looking surprised. " Well, I never thought that would have mattered. Come in, then—yes, you too, Ferdinand, you can come."

Actually she was looking at him compassionately as they made their way up the veranda steps.

CHAPTER XVI

THUS it befell that during the next week or two the sun, coming from its rosy bed to greet a still heated world, shone daily upon an ostentatiously peaceful gathering busy breakfasting at the Grotto.

There was Mr. Fernandez, in his threadbare but spotless white suit, blinking round the table over the top of the steel-rimmed glasses, rubbing his eagle nose occasionally with a thoughtful air, patient even under the attacks on his bald forehead by skirmishers from the troop of flies that were, as usual, engaged in lazily wheeling about the centre of the room. There was the lady of the house, wearing her accustomed look of morning pride, dressed, one could have sworn, in the identical white wrapper—there was an iron-mould on the bodice—that she was to have been seen in any morning for the past month. Amy sat in her usual place, looking rather subdued but as stout as ever, gazing downwards perhaps too often for one perfectly happy. She too wore a costume with which all the party were familiar. But Ferdinand was arrayed in khaki and putties, with tremendously thick-soled boots, and wore his jacket unbuttoned at the neck with an edge of white singlet showing, as is the custom of the more knowing among the European pioneers out East.

The ants which crawled about having their breakfast

were first cousins at any rate to those who were in the habit of using the floor as a restaurant. And the very identical old hen wandered in self-consciously about dessert-time, and loudly pretended to be scared by the banana skin Mrs. Fernandez threw at her.

But although the sun from its distant pathway might perhaps have been unable to detect any alteration in this pleasant daily scene, an alteration had nevertheless taken place. There was a different atmosphere nowadays in that little eating-room. And the old hen knew it. Always self-conscious, once this lady had been self-confident also. She had advanced boldly into the room as does a person favourably known to the head waiter. Sometimes even she had dared to cluck in a well-bred undertone. But now, what a change ! The walk that was once a strut is stilted and uneasy. Gone is that noble carriage, head held high as an ear-ringed beauty's. She wears a sneaking, timid air now. She looks round corners whether there are corners to be looked round or not. "Such a small crumb, ladies and gentlemen, you won't miss it." (Be still, fluttering heart !)

"Shoo ! Go away !" says Mrs. Fernandez violently. And she flings the banana skin. And after that another ! Another ! No, this bungalow, nowadays, is no place for a self-respecting hen. There is no cheerful air about it, in spite of the bright sunshine, the sparkling warmth of the morning, the yellow creepers peeping in through the veranda rail, the crimson vaseful of bougainvillæa which adorns the centre of the breakfast table. All merriment has fled the Grotto, real merriment, that is. True, there is a strained air of

gaiety about, sedulously fostered by old Mr. Fernandez. But Amy's smile is always forced, and Ferdinand's laugh rings hollow.

He had on that memorable morning effected a reconciliation with Mrs. Fernandez, on the understanding that his late bride was to be no longer mentioned or thought of at the Grotto, and that she and her relations were scum, and were to be hated for ever. The old lady behaved now as if she was beginning to try and think well of him again, but the scar made by his madness remained ; she was still uneasy. And her nature did not permit her to suffer in silence. Ferdinand himself, so it seemed to the onlooker, opened his mouth merely to find her jumping down his throat. So long as he talked about work he was safe, but let him mention the ladies and she was up in arms. " You keep your tongue off them ; you nothing more to do with them ; you just an ivied ruin," she would observe, shattering his smiles like window-panes. There had been one really bad scene since his welcome back. That was when enthusiasm had caught him and he had referred to the barmaid at Willie's. After experiencing the force of her tongue on that occasion he trod warily as one who crosses a field of other people's corns.

He was looking older ; he had a rabbit-like air, had Ferdinand, ears alert, eyes scared and gentle, and mouth opened principally for the purpose of eating. He was very regular in his habits now, working hard daily for the firm, weeding the garden of a late afternoon under the eye of Mrs. Fernandez, retiring early to bed. What he thought about his late romance nobody

in the house knew, so reticent was he on this subject ; and even when Mr. Fernandez, instructed by his good lady, took him aside privately and told him he might unbosom himself, he remained dumb to all intents and purposes, blushing the while a dusky red.

"There's no spirit left in him. He seems to have got that birthmark on his conscience. He seems to think it disgraceful, a mark of his shameful birth. His one wish is to keep Amy and all the rest from knowing he has this birthmark," the old man told his wife afterwards. "He won't talk about what happened on the wedding-day. I can't get him to say anything except that Mrs. Roga and he were in a state of disgust with each other ever since leaving the church. He asked me again and again if Amy knew about his birthmark. I told him so far as I knew, 'no.' "

"Oh yess, he's thinking all about Amy now, but mark my words, Mr. Fernandez, if that woman holds up a little finger he will be off, you see."

"No, no, I don't think so," replied the old gentleman. "There's something about this wedding that I don't unnerstand, something mysterious. He is not fond of this Mrs. Roga, I'm sure. No man would speak of her like that if he were. And all this talk about the birthmark. You would have married me supposing I had a birthmark, wouldn't you, my dear ? "

"But I didn't marry you for your looks, silly stupid," retorted Mrs. Fernandez, patting on his bald head playfully. "I couldn't, could I now ? "

"Oh well, I wasn't so bad-faced, you know thatt," the old gentleman replied, with a self-conscious grimace. They were alone together on the veranda,

she sitting beside his long chair sewing, whilst he, fanned by the cooling afternoon breeze, lay in his favourite place, near the rail beside the rustling bougainvillæa.

"But you were never so handsome as Ferdinand, never, though he is such a wretched fellow," cried the old lady. "You were much more of a man, oah yess. But Ferdinand is a handsome. He is a pretty. It is his looks that she wanted. Oh, the bad creature! I can't drive her wickedness out of my thoughts."

She patted the weather-stained, boarded floor with one foot, sewing impatiently; and for a while there was silence. Her husband slid down an old worn hand, and drawing a plaited case from his pocket, got out and lit a cigarette. He inhaled, wasting not a breath of smoke. Far above his head, on a roof beam, a tiny lizard, bloated, white, and wrinkled, darted and caught a wasp, dropped it hastily, and ran back to cover.

"Ah, just like that!" exclaimed Mr. Fernandez, chuckling.

"Like what, silly stupid?" asked his wife, looking up from her sewing, mystified.

"Did you ever see a chick-chack catch a wasp? They drop them quick. Just like Mrs. Roga dropped Ferdinand. She wouldn't have dropped him so quick just for a birthmark. No, it is something else. Don't tell an old man."

"I don't know. I don't know," said Mrs. Fernandez with a despairing wave of the garment she was busy on. "She's a bad creature! And so upsetting too! All

my plans upset for Amy. And Amy feels it; she must."

She got up and walked to and fro: she simply had to, her expression showed that. After a moment or so the old man rose and, going to her, put an arm about her waist and drew her to the veranda rail.

They looked out. Ferdinand, still in khaki working uniform, but with coat cast aside, had paused in his weeding and, squatting on the edge of the small beshrubbed border, talked to Amy. In the quickening twilight his features were not easily discernible, but the set of his head and the expression of his thin figure betokened perhaps something greater than a mere friendly interest in the girl before him. She was laughing, waving a hand expressively, looking more animated by far than she did usually. In that gloaming her face crowned by its heavy coils of glossy hair seemed almost handsome, her sturdy white-garbed figure emblematic of truth and homely happiness.

"Oh dear me! Oh dear me, father dear!" whispered the old lady with a sudden sob, clinging suddenly to her husband's arm. "Oh, see what a ruin to ours! See what might have been if he had not married. And we must stop all this."

"Yess, yess, we must, dear," he said sadly. "But never give up our hope," he went on. "I know something will happen. I'm sure of it. He won't always be tied to that woman like this. Poor boy! Poor Hopping Bird! He's a good fellow when he forgets all this silly European nonsense. And something will happen. You will see."

The west was glowing still. A fleet of tiny clouds sailed the transparent heavens, a golden armada voyaging the infinite. Evening spread its shadows gently, the kind, clear darkness mingling with the last warm light of day. One by one the stars unveiled. One by one the night flowers opened, shedding intense perfume to the heavy air. The gilded palms were still as though enchanted. The night-jars wheeled, and great moths flitted by.

It was at supper that evening after a long silence that Ferdinand said : " Oh dear me ! "

" What's the matter now ? " asked the old lady sharply. " Don't you like the pudding ? "

" It's not the pudding, mother," he replied in a sorrowful tone, laying down his spoon and allowing his glance to fall first on Amy and then on vacancy opposite. " The pudding's all right. It's my heart that is not. I been and mislaid my affection."

" You liked eating out of a coco-nut shell," retorted the old lady, without a sign of compassion for his evident misery. " You wouldn't notice the warnings we gave you. And what can any of us do for you now ? It is too late. You are in her hands."

" Oah yess. I'm in her hands," he wailed. Then his tone changed and he said irritably : " What am I, a happy married or a single blessed ? I'm neither a fish nor a fowl nor a herring ! What am I ? "

" You're a stupid back number," snapped Mrs. Fernandez. " I doan't want to talk any more to you about your stupid marryings. I'm thankful that I've got nothing more to do with her. Where does she

come from? Who are her relations? Out of the gutter. I want nothing to do with them."

She finished her meal viciously and, rising, at once began to clear the supper table. When Amy and she, bearing trays, went off to the platform at the back to wash up, old Mr. Fernandez put on his eye-glasses and cast a look of affectionate inquiry on Ferdinand, who, since the old lady's rebuff, had not opened his mouth, and who now sat, with his head between his hands, bowed over the table.

"Now then, Ferdinand," he said at last, reaching across and touching the young man on the arm. "*Jangan hati susa.*" Like so many old Eurasians he occasionally dropped into Malay. "What is the good of groaning always about the past troubles? Try and be cheerful. Perhaps your wife will die."

"Oh no, she will not," muttered Ferdinand. "She's as strong as a stone wall. Mother is very hard on my reported wife's relations," he went on, sitting up and facing the old man. "I myself think it is too great severeness. How can her relations help being her relations? Great Scott and Dickens! They were born like it, weren't they? That's what I want to know."

"I expect they're all tarred with the same tar brush," responded Mr. Fernandez carelessly. He reached back and, taking a handful of *langsats* from a basket that stood on a side table, laid them before him; selecting the largest he peeled off the yellow skin and popped the white pulpy fruit into his mouth. After a time he said thoughtfully: "I didn't know she had any relations, Ferdinand."

"Oah yess, she has relations," asseverated Ferdinand uneasily. "She has some fine relations. One of them—" he stopped a moment. His features became contorted; "one of them is a promising young chap, just about my age."

"Oh—um!" grunted Mr. Fernandez, busy with his second langsat.

"Father," began Ferdinand in a very earnest tone.

"Yes?" inquired the old man, looking up.

"Father, I was thinking, that this promising young chap would be a very nice man for Amy, father. He's—he's a sort of nephew of my reported wife's. Suppose he was to come along to you with request for hand of Amy?"

"Quite out of question," replied Mr. Fernandez, with much decision. "Why, Ferdinand, what do you think? You must be dreaming, boy! We don't want to have any more to do with this woman. As for her relations, I would not allow them in my gutters!"

"But this young chap is different from all the rest," argued Ferdinand eagerly.

"That doesn't matter. We want nothing to do with him. Very likely the scum of the earth when you get to know him!" said Mr. Fernandez severely. "I warn you not to bring him to the Grotto," he added with an alarmed look. "Mother would never allow one of your wife's relations in this house, I'm sure, and neither should I."

"Not bring him to the Grotto!" cried Ferdinand in a sudden frenzy. "Not allow him in this house! How can I help it? Great Scott and Dickens! Oh!

miserable blighter ! Not bring him to the Grotto ! Oh, you doan't unnerstand ! ”

He jumped up and rushed from the room like a madman, leaving old Mr. Fernandez staring after him transfixed.

“ What are you sitting there for like a petrified parrot, old stupid ? ” inquired Mrs. Fernandez on entering. “ Either eat the *buah* langsats or lay it back on the table. For goodness' sakes don't stay there holding it half-way to your mouth. Getting on my nerves, thatt is what you are doing ! ”

It was not until Amy had retired that he explained the cause of his astonishment. After discussing Ferdinand's behaviour from every possible point of view, they regretfully came to the conclusion that shock threatened to drive him mad. What other explanation could be found for his daring to suggest that their daughter, for whom plainly he felt budding love, should marry the nephew of his wife, a woman whom they all loathed and hated ? They waited up for the young fellow in a state of no small anxiety. Mrs. Fernandez pointed out that he had often threatened to commit suicide, and that a man who dared marry a woman like that Mrs. Roga had courage enough for anything. Mr. Fernandez tried to soothe her with the proverbs, “ No news is good news,” and “ Absence makes the heart grow fonder,” which, he said, applied especially to lunatics.

At last they heard the truant come up the back steps and enter his bedroom.

Life at the bungalow became for Ferdinand softer and pleasanter after that evening. The old couple

treated him more like an honoured guest than a relative.

Fearful that his mind might leave him, they chatted with him continually in order to engage it. They encouraged his passion for gaudy socks in order to keep him from brooding. And old Mr. Fernandez actually himself undertook the supervision of the work on the Bitas Estate drainage scheme, to save Ferdinand the fatigue of cycling.

Ferdinand entered a protest against this last sacrifice, but when Amy joined her entreaties to those of her parents he began to waver. It was Mrs. Fernandez as usual who clinched the business.

"Oah, Ferd-in-hand," she protested, maliciously accenting the last syllable. "Always wanting to hop away from the nest. Cannot you perch a little while beside me and Amy? Are we not good enough? Perhaps it is that Miss Hamilton he goes so often to see, father?"

"It iss nott! I hate her! You know I do, mother," cried Ferdinand, with an excited waving of the hands. A redness, alarming to the family under the circumstances, suffused his face.

"Oh, mother, I am sure you are mistaken," said the old man hurriedly.

"You know I hate her, all of you do," went on Ferdinand in indignation. "She was at my late wedding, oah yess, and some reports naturally perhaps got blown round by the envious ones of my presumed happiness. But it was all a scandal, I assure you, Amy. You believe it?"

The undecided manner of the girl's nod seemed to

make him more anxious than ever to convince them all.

"She was at my wedding—that is the truth," he continued volubly. "And do you know why? Do you know why she was asked? She was asked to show her that she was not the only pebble on my beach. To see with a gnashing of her teeth the much finer article selected by me."

"We believe you, of course we believe you," cried the old lady soothingly. "Don't trouble about these people, they are all trash; forget them all, that is what you must do."

"I do want you to stay at home with me, Ferdinand," pouted Amy.

"Of course if you ask me, Amy," he responded, with a gallant bow.

She flushed slightly and looked away.

"Her little dog is full of ticks and she wants you to clean and bath it," explained Mrs. Fernandez, helping her out.

"O-o-oh," said Ferdinand, looking a shade disappointed.

But the old man found the journey to and fro from the Bitas Estate under a hot tropical sun rather too much for him. From what he told his wife it seemed as though Ferdinand would have to run the risk and take up the work again.

Mr. Samuel Pawker, the manager, coming to inspect the main ditch and finding it almost completed, solved this difficulty.

"Mr. Pawker has taken over the contract now," announced the old man jubilantly on his return to the Grotto one evening. "He says he is very pleased

with our progress, but he has planting to do in that part of the estate, and I am to leave my coolies for two days only and they will finish the main drain under European supervision. This young gentleman, Mr. Lloyd Guiy, your best man, Ferdinand, is now put on by Mr. Pawker as supervisor."

"Lloyd Guiy. Oah yess. Not a bad old kipper!"

"He is a nice gentleman," agreed Mr. Fernandez, wiping his large bald forehead. The evening was hot. "He spoke to me. He asked for you, Ferdinand, and about your happiness—if you were comfortably settled."

"What did you say, father?" enquired Ferdinand eagerly.

"I said that you were absolutely settled and that your wife had settled you," replied the old man, fanning himself with his red handkerchief. "And then I told him that you had left the bride owing to quarrellings on the honeymoon. He said that he was sorry. And your Miss Hamilton said——"

"Was she there too?" asked Ferdinand, jumping up in surprise, and at once sitting down again with a confused glance at Amy. "Not that I care one tuppence," he went on elaborately. "She can be at any places she likes."

"They were all there," replied Mr. Fernandez. "It was a very important visiting party. They came up when I was talking to Mr. Guiy. Mr. and Mrs. Pawker, and Miss Hamilton, and Mr. Baylers too. He is a very stern man, that Mr. Baylers. I do not think he likes you, Ferdinand, as he quite laughed when he heard about your unfortunate marriage; but Miss Hamilton,

she spoke to me so softly and kindly saying how sorry she was and——”

“Sorry!” cried Ferdinand, hitting the table with his clenched fist in sudden passion. “They laugh at me! The blighters! I am their laughstock!”

It took them all most of the evening to win him back to peacefulness.

CHAPTER XVII

IT must not be deduced from their presence together at the inspection of the new main ditch that Una and Lloyd were friends again. Had she considered a meeting probable, Una, in the frame of mind she was in about that time, would have tried to avoid it. But Samuel Pawker had never breathed a word about the young man's return, so, for aught she knew, he was still detained on a distant part of the estate.

As his wife had said more than once, Mr. Pawker had a maddening instinct for being garrulous about what people did not want to know. He himself put this characteristic of his down to the business instinct within him. Whatever the cause generally, Una felt fairly certain that in this particular instance his reticence was not calculated. Had she shown any interest in Lloyd Guiry's movements, without doubt he would have given her the fullest information. But since the first week after her arrival she had studiously refrained from doing so, and Samuel might well be pardoned for neglecting to talk about an unimportant assistant in whom none of the household had, so far as he knew officially, any great concern.

Moreover Samuel, she could not help noticing, was no longer the same Samuel. All his jolly, friendly ways appeared to be leaving him. Indeed, so it seemed to her, a shadow was descending on the household.

Meal-times were not, as formerly, occasions of festival when oftentimes one could scarcely eat for chuckling, and dyspepsia fled before the host's bad jokes. Nowadays long spells of silence afflicted the table, and even the childish remarks of Sallie junior failed to arouse a smile. And the child was quick to notice the difference.

"Why doesn't Daddy laugh at me now?" Una overheard her ask Mrs. Pawker.

"He can't be always laughing at little girls, can he, Sallie junior?" responded Mrs. Pawker, putting on a playful air. "Daddy has to be busy with his work to get some money to buy us all nice dresses."

"But he always laughs at what Mr. Baylers says, and so do you, mammy. Once upon a time he used to laugh at me too," went on the child in a grieved way.

"Don't be so stupid," cried Mrs. Pawker. She caught her up and kissed her, the while looking at Una rather uneasily.

"Sallie's like a needle," she remarked to Una afterwards. "I think these hot climates are bad for children. They shoot ahead like plants in a greenhouse. Between ourselves, Mr. Pawker is rather worried just now. Some difficulty has been discovered by Mr. Baylers about the estate land grant. I don't understand what, but Mr. Baylers and he are going into it, and I think that eventually Mr. Baylers will be able to make it all smooth at head-quarters, at least he says he will. I do hope," she went on, looking rather confused—"I mean I am so glad that you and Mr. Baylers seem to hit it off so well. It makes things go so much smoother when he likes coming here."

"He certainly seems to like coming," returned Una.

"Sometimes," she added bitterly, "I wonder he does not live here altogether : it would save his horses !"

"Oh, be nice to him, Una, be nice to him ! It's so very important to all of us !" exclaimed the lady, looking rather alarmed at the governess's way of putting things. "You will, won't you ?" She was actually pleading.

"Of course. Why not ?" Una returned, with an assumption of gaiety sufficient to deceive the good lady, but inwardly indignant.

And, mingled with this indignation, there came an access to the load of depression which she too had been suffering under for many weeks now. Bound and delivered, that was how she felt.

As for Lloyd Guiy—somewhat in this way her thoughts ran on him while she was supposed to be taking an afternoon nap shortly after her unexpected encounter with him at the inspection of the main ditch—as for Lloyd Guiy, her feelings on that subject were open at any time to the investigation of a committee of spinsters, and so, for that matter, was her conduct. It seemed, she told herself bitterly, that he was lost to all politeness and nice feeling, was frequenting gaming-houses with half-caste women, was in demand as best man at their weddings, was going down, down, down. Extraordinary that he should do such things, although she remembered that her step-mother always said that he was weak and easily led and would quickly succumb to the temptations of the East. That half-caste woman was presumably a temptation ! Perhaps as best man he had kissed that half-caste woman ! Yes, he must have done ! And yet directly

afterwards he had had the nerve to come out and talk to her, looking at her, pleading with her as if— Oh, worthless! But it was nothing to do with her, of course. She was sorry, for his family's sake. Anything within reason she could do she would. She might, now that he was nearer at hand, working on this ditch, be able, unknown to him, to stretch out a helping hand. One never knew.

She lay clad in a white wrapper on her curtain-draped, white bed. The shutters were closed, darkening the room. But through their every chink, through each crack in the boarded walls, the sunlight streamed in, white-hot as though a furnace burned without, and the air was breathless.

And then, after having delivered for the hundredth time a verdict on Lloyd Guiy's doings, she found herself thinking how terribly trying it must be to have to work all day under the glare of this tropical sun, especially for those not thoroughly seasoned to it. She began to imagine young men, tall, not over strong, young men wearing khaki sun helmets with enormous brims, engaged in labour, their backs bent under this terrible sun. She imagined them working at large ditches where the yellow dust half choked them, working hopelessly, spiritlessly, for the reason that they had nothing to work for, because somebody, perhaps thoughtlessly, had slain all their hopes.

She stirred uneasily. "I wonder if I really ought to have answered that last letter of his. Oh, I believe I ——" she whispered to herself.

And then, suddenly, after a moment of absolute stillness, she jumped up and ran, her white wrapper

loose, unbuttoned, and snatching her keys from the dressing-table, she knelt beside a leather trunk on a stand and began to unlock and unpack. For a letter from a worthless creature like Lloyd Guiy the place of storage seemed ridiculously secure. Three keys had to be manipulated, endless folded belongings scattered furiously. At last from an innermost shrine she brought forth a little box of cedarwood, and drawing aside the still swaying curtains crept back on to the bed.

Extraordinary what fluttering of the breath her slight exertions seem to have caused ! How quickly, how unevenly her bosom rises and falls. She glances from side to side involuntarily and very needlessly, her cheeks a delicate glow. And then with a wriggle, a modest hand for a moment busy as if conscious of the presence of a little winged boy, she sits erect, places the box on her knees and opens it. Oh, poets, painters ! She pulls out a faded rosebud : again she looks about her in an ashamed, furtive way. The small boy yawns, sits down on a pair of corsets and brushes a mosquito off the end of his nose with his left wing.

"Dash these insects !" he may be heard to mutter. "Why can't she hurry ? And me due at the Grotto at 6.30 sharp ! Anyone would think, by the way she's going on, that she's hired me by the week !"

Considering all things, however, including the fact that it became necessary for her to make up her mind, she was not so very long. An hour afterwards Mrs. Pawker came out on to the veranda, and going to the rail caught sight of a lady in purest white, a white that in the dazzling sunshine almost glittered against the

deep green of the rubber trees, walking slowly but aimfully away from the bungalow.

"Oh!" said Mrs. Pawker to herself, gazing very hard. "Why, it's Una!" she murmured, looking puzzled. "What can the girl be doing out there now?" And then—Mrs. Pawker's eyes must have deceived her—the figure seemed to stop, raise the white parasol in its hand and wave it timidly. "Really," muttered Mrs. Pawker, looking more puzzled than ever. "Bless her!"

The white figure disappeared into the distant plantation.

Half an hour after that again Mr. Samuel Pawker came driving in his buggy home to tea and, as was his custom, pulled up at the new main ditch for a moment in order to give the man in charge an opportunity of coming and reporting progress. Dry weather still reigned; red dust hung everywhere; the air was choking.

The coolies, busy as ever with changkols, spades, and baskets, redoubled their efforts as though inspired by his presence, and made the air more choking still. Every moment of waiting passed unpleasantly. Flies buzzed around. The syce jumped down from his seat at the back and kept them off the sweating pony's head by means of a long white brush.

"Where is that fellow, Guiy?" muttered Samuel, impatiently mopping a dripping forehead. "Bless him!" And then again, after a long wait ended by an abrupt inquiry addressed to the mandor—to ask a native about the movements of one of the European assistants was Samuel's last resort—"Bless his eyes,

he doesn't seem to be doin' well at all, this chap." Looking very disgusted, he signed to the syce and they drove on.

But in the wood where she waited, trembling, but not for an instant doubtful, always with a feeling of gladness, of charity for the moment to every one and everything, the air was cool as that near a fountain. Zephyrs fanned her flushed cheek, bringing with them from out of hidden bowers strange, sweet, jungle scents, scents perhaps distilled for her alone, perfumes that made her grow pale and close her eyes ; and then open them, and flush, and smile.

Presently he came running, hat in hand, and looking half scared, as though some one had whispered to him news of great good fortune, news which he dared not yet believe ; and at a sign took his place beside her.

" I noticed you wave, Una," he said in a low voice. " I thought, I don't know why, that perhaps—you wanted to speak to me. So I came."

She did not respond, and glancing up he saw that she was gazing straight ahead of her. And on her face was a look that he had never seen before.

" Una ! " he whispered passionately. No need to tell him the meaning of her look, for him to see her flushed face, averted now.

" Lloyd, dear, dear Lloyd ! "

The woods had kept a temple for them, a little oasis at the edge of the great plantation, where giant trees, for ever garlanded with ferns and twisted creepers, stood like immense columns, reaching half up to the heavens. But the thick leafage which these trees spread was not impenetrable. Through the dark green

canopy above, sunlight found a way, chequering the mosses and grass underfoot, throwing a shimmering pattern over the rough, fallen trunk on which the two sat, forming a halo of Una's golden hair. It shone bright on those two young faces pressed close, all warm and flushed with innocent love.

"Drat these mosquitoes!" murmured a small boy, flapping his wings feverishly. "If these people keep me here much longer I shall have to borrow a meat safe to sit in.—That's right!"

This last remark apparently because Una, sitting a little apart, began to pat her hair.

"I am untidy," she murmured, looking at Lloyd and smiling.

"Dash it! There they are again! Well, I've had enough of this! I'm off to the Grotto!"

A moment later Una began to put her hair straight in real businesslike earnest. The sun sank out of range of the tree-tops, withdrawing its glad illumination. On its going, twilight filled the woods.

"Hold these pins, Lloyd," said Una. "Oh dear, how late it must be! I wonder what Mrs. Pawker will say."

He was looking at her with eyes still full of amazement and adoration.

"It doesn't matter: what anyone says now doesn't matter," he returned.

"You ought to have been at your work too, I'm sure. Fancy wasting your time like this."

She was speaking now as if in an effort after flippancy, as if she desired to reach the safety of the commonplace again. Her slightly self-conscious gaze sought to

avoid his. The hand outstretched for the pins trembled. He tried to clasp it.

"Oh no, no," she murmured, drawing away. "We must hurry back. It is so late."

He picked up her topee and gave it to her. "Do you know, Lloyd," she said in calmer tones as she pinned it on, "do you know what my stepmother called me when she heard I was coming out here?"

"No, what was that?" he asked, following her as she walked out of their oasis into the orderly plantation.

"I ought not to tell you. She called me Diana. Oh, you'll think it's true."

"Diana? Oh, I see!" For a moment he looked angry. "What a thing to say! Oh, dearest, if she only knew how much I had always worshipped you! How much I longed to tell you; but I never felt good enough for you, and so I went away."

"I should have come out here whether you were here or not," explained Una, comically anxious to dispel any vestige of doubt that might linger.

"I know you would," he agreed, laughing. "In fact, I was beginning to think—perhaps I was certain—that you were a little sorry I was here. At that Eurasian wedding——"

"Don't talk about it," she interrupted quickly, putting a hand on his arm. "It was all my fault. I thought things—I lost trust. Let us forget all that. Let it be dead like—like these leaves," she finished, pointing down to the rustling carpet they now trod. "We're friends again, we'll never quarrel any more."

"More than friends, though," he said with a joyful

smile. But then as she did not reply he stopped and repeated: "More than friends, dear."

"A little more," she agreed, hesitating over a definition. "But a little less than—than the next." She looked downwards, stirring the dead leaves with her foot. "I mean, dear," she went on in tones that she tried to keep firm and cheerful, "we haven't said anything that either of us cannot take back."

"But we are engaged? Dearest, don't say we're not!"

"Call it a trial trip," she returned. And he could not get her to consent to anything more definite. She would not even agree to another meeting; but she bade him come very often to the bungalow.

So he went away with a gladness not entirely unalloyed. She on her part was conscious of having been kinder than her reason had meant her to be when she had sallied forth that afternoon.

CHAPTER XVIII

SHE hurried home. Darkness was now gathering swiftly. The sky wore cloth-of-gold, splashed and blotted, in places growing inky black, reflecting, so she felt, her thoughts. The gladness of these had begun to die. Already she had shown signs of misgivings about the consequences. Her firm refusal to consent to a definite engagement was one of them.

Had Lloyd been very insistent during those moments in the wood she might have promised anything; but almost directly afterwards cold reason returned, bringing with it the memory of Baylers, of his threats, her difficulties. And she was now becoming in a manner dismayed.

Worse was that, although she loved Lloyd Guiy and would not have changed him for anyone, she had no confidence whatever in his ability to fight his own battles, much less the battles of both of them. She could not imagine him, for instance, standing up to Baylers and saying, "I defy you! Do your worst!" for long. That sort of act she was certain Lloyd would soon tire of. Rather did she picture a scene where Baylers, wearing a great wig, was doing his worst, and Lloyd, who stood in a small box guarded by two constables, was listening to him doing it. This timidity seems rather absurd, perhaps, but hers was a vivid imagination, and already she had experienced

something of the hard nature and apparently limitless authority of Baylers. Others beside herself realised that too. Samuel Pawker had more than once of late openly inveighed, with a bitterness strange enough in him, concerning the practically limitless power for good or ill that lay, so he declared, in the hands of the head of a district. He had mentioned no names, and had emphasised the fact that almost without exception Government officials were true to their trust, and everything they ought to be, but——

“How lucky we have Mr. Baylers here,” his wife had hurriedly interposed, and Samuel, pulling himself up and looking rather guilty, had agreed that it was. Plain enough whom they were thinking of!

Matters would perhaps have been different had Lloyd done no wrong, had he not become mixed up in a gambling case, and with all those shady people. Some day, she resolved, when they knew each other a lot better, she would have a good talk to Lloyd, and make him promise not to go to such places again. She hardly felt courage enough for such a conversation yet. It would have to be done very tactfully.

When she reached the big wooden staircase leading to the veranda the lamps of the bungalow were already lighted. Their mellow radiance seemed, like the glow of a furnace, to give depth and heat to the surrounding darkness, and emphasised the lateness of the hour. She ascended, conscience-stricken, wondering what explanation she should give Mrs. Pawker for being away at tea-time. Much to her relief the big, bare veranda was empty, and she gained her bedroom without encountering a soul.

That she was never asked to explain her absence was due probably to the unexpected arrival of Baylers, whose announcement that he proposed staying for dinner if invited had the effect, after the first stunning blow, of making Mrs. Pawker go off into a violent fit of housekeeping.

Her excited instructions to the Chinese cook, given in a loud whisper, penetrated to Una's bedroom and gave her notice of the guest's arrival.

"Have you enough soup?" hissed Mrs. Pawker.

"The mem must not be worried about the soup," came the cook's reply, in a baritone which must have been audible on the very veranda. "With the addition of hot water I can make any quantity the mem wishes."

"But it's for the Tuan Magistreet!"

"Then the mem must open a new tin," decided the cook, who plainly did not intend to allow even a magistrate to flurry him.

"Come with me then to the cupboard," Mrs. Pawker ordered in a frenzied whisper.

The sound of their footsteps died away. And Una, who was already dressed, deliberately took off the fresh, pretty frock she had on, and, smiling spitefully, put on her oldest black one.

Of the dinner that evening, as of the dead, even chickens, shall be said *nil nisi bonum*. Mrs. Pawker, sitting restless at the end of the table, could doubtless have pointed out a fault every minute. But to Una the conversation very quickly became engrossing; she almost forgot to eat the last course—luckily for her, so Mr. Pawker afterwards remarked.

It began, the interesting part of the conversation, with an observation from the magistrate about the Fernandez family. He said that he thought that it was time there was a contractor who could be trusted established in Sudora, and that doddering old fool Fernandez took down his sign. "He shall not get any more Government work. I'll see to that. I've written down to Pelung already to try and induce somebody to come."

"He's not so bad, the old boy," protested Samuel.

"But you've knocked him off your drainage scheme, I hear, and taken it on yourself," remarked the magistrate, with a cynical smile. "They do say, Miss Una, that charity begins at home. We have an example of it here. What!"

"But I didn't stop him because his work was not up to the mark," explained Samuel. "I wanted to get the thing finished."

"Just so!" interjected Baylers. "Sometimes, strangely enough, we are like that in the Government."

"He did very well," protested Samuel stoutly. "Exceedingly well. Of course that marriage of his son's stopped his work a bit."

"Yes, I knew it would. I know what they are, most of these Eurasians," proclaimed Baylers. "As little reliable as natives. Any native will stop his work for weeks, Miss Una, if there is a marriage taking place in the family. You are aware of that, I suppose. They ruin themselves over marriages. Well, I know enough now," he went on, dropping his voice, and with a meaning look at her, "to understand them doing it."

"Yes. I knew about the marriages," responded Una colourlessly.

"Miss Hamilton had an invitation," chimed in Samuel. "All on her own, for her alone. Didn't she, Sallie?"

"Boy, give the master the bone," ordered Mrs. Pawker, starting from a reverie.

The manager, waving away the dish, explained that he was referring to the Fernandez wedding. Mrs. Pawker produced a large red fan and began to use it vigorously, saying that *really* the evenings seemed to be getting warmer and warmer.

"I don't know why it was sent," said Una, laughing reminiscently. "It was so very unexpected. Oh—the bridegroom, as you know, used to work for his father on the main ditch, and once he brushed a centipede off my dress; perhaps that was it. Do you know him, Mr. Baylers? Ferdinand, his name is. He seems so queerly mannered and excitable. I saw him once afterwards. And such a boy too, to be married. I wanted to go, I wanted to see an Eurasian wedding. It was splendid, but so hot, and such a crush. The bride was gorgeous. And gorgeously handsome, too. Just the sort of woman I imagined when I used to read of the tropics——"

"He's a beastly little fellow, that young Fernandez," broke in the magistrate, in a harsh voice. His face had changed as though something was ruffling his temper. "He was in that gambling case. I wish I had not let him off. But I'll have him yet."

"Oh, don't, Mr. Baylers," urged Una demurely. "He's so small."

"That doesn't matter," the magistrate returned, with a hard look.

"He might escape between your claws, he's so small," she pursued, allowing herself a faint smile, but nevertheless inwardly aghast at her boldness.

"Like a shrimp through the teeth of a crocodile," laughed Samuel, forgetting himself. "Ha! Ha!—I mean that surely Miss Hamilton is right," he ended confusedly, with a wavering glance at his guest.

"Oh!" murmured Una, looking too. Then she studied the tablecloth, her heart beating a shade more quickly. Never had she seen such an expression of fury on a face. "He will make a scene," she thought, claspng her hands tightly.

But instead he said in a suppressed, threatening voice: "Miss Hamilton, as usual, prefers mercy to justice. But the Government cannot afford to be too lenient with wrong-doers in this country. Nor, Mr. Pawker, with people who would seek to hold it up to ridicule. It's a bad day for anyone when he gets up against the Government, Miss Hamilton."

She felt his angry eyes fixed on her and, with an effort, lifted her head and met their gaze.

"I'm sure——" she began, then stopped uncomfortably, at a loss what to say.

"You are very right indeed, Mr. Baylers," cried Mrs. Pawker, in alarmed tones. "Both my husband and I think you are most generous, most lenient about the case, don't you, Samuel?"

"I do, most certainly I do, and Mr. Baylers knows it," agreed the manager, with anxious emphasis. He ceased mopping his forehead.

"They have Miss Una to thank," muttered Baylers. "I ought to have locked them up. Yes. I can't save him again."

"But, Mr. Baylers, none of us care about these half-castes," protested Mrs. Pawker.

"I was referring more to their European friend, Guiy his name is, isn't it?" explained Baylers, in a disdainful voice. "Why do you let your assistants mix with these people, Pawker?" he went on. "I should have thought Guiy had had a good enough lesson. But he's still friends with that miserable little Fernandez, I understand. Best man at his wedding, too, wasn't he, Miss Hamilton? Phoh!"

"Oh, that was an accident," cried Una impulsively. "I don't think there is anything to be ashamed of in what he did."

But she found herself in a minority.

Samuel tried in vain to turn the conversation. His obvious anxiety that she should be spared increased her feeling of discomfiture. But Baylers was not to be diverted. Question followed question, every one of them about Lloyd, his progress, his character, asked of the table, aimed at her. It was she herself and not the rather stuttering Samuel that was being cross-examined. She knew that not a flush, not a look of annoyance or self-consciousness escaped her enemy. What could make the man act like this? He professed fondness for her. Was this his way of showing it? Perhaps it was. Savages once, she had heard, did their courting with a big club.

"Oh, isn't it fearfully hot sometimes in that dining-room?" remarked Mrs. Pawker to her as the two of

them filed out on to the veranda. "I couldn't help noticing you just now. You looked simply overcome. And Samuel won't have a punkah. He says they're not necessary out here. I really think Mr. Baylers was a little severe on Mr. Guiy," she went on, taking up her usual position on the lady's long chair near the lamp. "Do you know, I think he is in a bad temper to-night. Do you think it could have been the dinner? Well, what can one do if people come unexpectedly like this? Do try and put him in a good humour! You know you can if you like!"

Sometimes in the tropics there comes a night when every living thing grows silent as though afraid. A tense stillness holds the jungle; the world outside is enveloped in an utter darkness from out of which, at intervals more or less frequent, enormous insects of weird shape, giant beetles, immense, strange moths, flee as if terror-struck and fling themselves bedazzled against the veranda lamp. The stillness grows intense, the moist heat more oppressive, and the whole world seems listening, every nerve strained, for it knows not what. Sometimes a storm breaks and the rain falls in a deluge, whitening the blackness, affording ease and a sense of safety; less often the dark fit of brooding that has seized the world continues until dawn brings relief.

On nights like these people care more than usual for each other's company, and even the hardest becomes a little kindlier. It may have been, for this was such a night, that Baylers had yielded to influences unguessed of by him. Or perhaps he desired to show that if he pleased he could be gracious too. Certain it was that,

when on some pretext or other the Pawkers left him and Una together on the veranda, he made himself pleasanter than she had so far known him attempt to do. And he never once mentioned Lloyd Guiy. They talked of her native place, which he seemed to know very well, although he said that he had never been there. He told her anecdotes about his work in the service of the Government, anecdotes which proved, after all deductions for his inherent boastfulness were made, that he might be considered at least a rising man. His ambition, she gathered, was immense. When he spoke of his plans and possibilities, while she still hated him she was conscious of feeling interested and respectful.

Later on he reverted to the topic of her life at home, and then, lulled perhaps by this new strain of softness he was exhibiting, anxious also, though scarcely conscious of this, to conciliate as far as possible one so able to affect her interests, she was led on into talking rather freely about herself.

She mentioned the reasons that had led up to her leaving to take a situation as governess. A desire to see the world, and a feeling that she would like to earn her own living, these were the ones she gave.

"I suppose your people were rather anxious about you: it's a long way to come?" he inquired. "I don't think I should care for the work myself."

"They didn't like it at all," she admitted. "And my godmother quarrelled with me for going. I wanted to please her too, but I couldn't give up the idea. One's life is one's own. But she wouldn't see that. She never answers my letters now. I'm very sorry."

He did not offer any comment, and glancing up she saw that he was frowning again as if something had ruffled him.

Later on, after he had driven away, Samuel Pawker, looking at her quizzically over the top of his last whisky and soda, asked what she had been saying to put their guest into such a fearful temper.

"Temper? Nothing that I remember," Una replied, surprised. "But I thought he was easier than usual."

"He was asking all sorts of things about your quarrel with your godmother," put in Mrs. Pawker, who was standing, bedroom lamp in hand, about to say good-night. "I told him—you didn't say it was private, did you, Una?—something about the old lady tearing up her will in front of you, because you insisted on coming out here. I hope you don't mind."

Whatever the reason, plainly something said or done that evening had given the magistrate offence. He stayed away from the bungalow until the Pawkers, at first relieved, became anxious and sent him a formal invitation. When he came he had the air of a stranger.

And they were not the only ones to mark the slackening in his attentions.

The whole town, interested beyond everything else in the love affairs of the great, also took note of the breach. In a hundred harems, little huts where women lived, prisoners who despised the free, Una's conduct in the circumstances was noted and commented on. In the opinion of the majority she did not feel the loss of her mighty lover. She still went, it was noted, abroad, shamelessly, with face unveiled and head erect, shewing no sign of grief.

At the Grotto Ferdinand remarked that his friends said that she had been flying at high game, which, he said, was equivalent to jumping after a sour grape, both of them being European proverbs.

"You see, Amy," he explained to the girl as they worked in the garden together at sundown, "a game is a bird that isn't a chicken, but then we have in the British language also game chickens or high flyers, and game legs; and the barmaid at Willie's is a fair game. But, on the other hand, we use the word high in the sense of up-in-the-airness and also in a sense of increasing smelliness. I know, because I asked this European man what he meant by saying high game. He told me that he was speaking idiotically. It's very irritating."

"But you're so clever, Ferdinand," murmured Amy, in admiring tones.

They both looked well and shinningly happy. The garden wore an ordered, cared-for appearance very new to it. On the veranda the old couple sat as usual out of the rays of sunset, Mr. Fernandez lying in his long cane chair inhaling a cigarette contentedly, his wife sewing and at the same time keeping a watchful eye on the couple in the garden.

She too talked of their magistrate's broken love affair.

"But we have wheels within wheels," her husband remarked. "I can tell you something you have not heard, my dear."

"What is that?"

"I told you to be patient. I told you to be kind to Hopping Bird. He would hop back some day, I knew.

Now listen, I will tell you a secret. You will be very glad." He put out a hand, caught her dress, and pulled her close. "The servant at the hotel told me," he whispered, "Tuan Baylers goes there in the evening verry, verry often to see Mrs. Roga. Nobody knows."

"Oh, the wretched bad woman," she said in a low tone, with great emphasis.

"It is a secret: you must not speak," he urged.

Already she was looking as though the news would burst her.

CHAPTER XIX

FROM my present situation I smile at that woman's venom. Me to be called "bad" by such as Mrs. Fernandez! She knows better by this time. Nowadays she speaks to me respectfully, she bows, and smirks, and fawns, and curries favours. Poor woman! I am polite, but I regard her quietly, curiously, as one regards a strange but harmless insect, and she writhes inwardly. Perhaps she will read this book and know that I am aware of her writhings, that I smile at her in contempt.

In one thing she was right. She called me, I see, "wretched," and, oh me, yes! I was wretched in those days. In that town of ours, where every person knew me and knew of my hotel, my portion was bitter compared with Ferdinand's. He, in their eyes, was a youth who had kissed and run away: I an old woman who ought to have had more shame, who was now deserted. I knew that is what they all were thinking. I could see them looking at me curiously, I caught scraps of conversation as I attended to my customers in the hotel. Some of these, too, spoke to me in a manner that showed that their respect for me was gone, and that they imagined I was a fool, willing, nay anxious, to throw away my good name for the sake of revenge on Ferdinand. I have wondered always if some such idea in the mind of Baylers caused him to

come back again to me. On the whole I do not think so. He knew me better than to think as those customers did, and would not have been so stupid. He is not a stupid man, not at all. Besides, he did not come back soon after my broken marriage, but waited for weeks and weeks, showing—who can say otherwise!—that it was love, fierce love, that he the strong man could not resist. Yes, I drew him back to me.

Do you believe in charms? You would if you lived with me among the palms and ferns in that sunny hot-house where every other bird, nay, even the little *plandok* deer, influences one's destiny, where many natives have the power of second sight, becoming *behantu*, seized by a ghost in broad daylight, twirling and dancing madly, foaming at the mouth, shaking to pieces the hut in their rapid movements, falling at last on the nibong latticed floor, all asweat. Many a woman that I have known has heard at night, as she lay awake in her pain, the *pontianak's* short, plaintive cry coming closer, closer, through the darkness, sounding like the bark of a deer, but to those that know terribly different; has told me of her sweating, trembling, of her disjointed whispers to Allah, her loud shriek when the maiden with the gory tresses and the fierce mouth entered and began to tear. They all died, these women, every one. And also others I have known who had the misfortune to incur the enmity of those powerful with the spirits. Men and women have I seen driven mad by love potions, grown all diseased. A piece of clothing is enough.

Once when visiting me Baylers had left a handkerchief behind him.

A long while elapsed before I thought of such things. My intention in the beginning, as you know, was to forget him altogether in my marriage. And when that marriage failed, still I determined that I would battle, that he should be nothing more to me.

But I used to think of him, I used to dream of him, cruel dreams that left me fevered and unrested in the morning, all unfit to face the day. And then people would come into my bar and tell me, little imagining how they stabbed, of what he was doing at the Bitas Estate, of this girl—he was *gila*, mad after her now, they said. It amused them to think of such a great one as the Tuan Magistrate grown *gila* about anyone. It seemed to put him on a level with themselves. I had to appear amused! Oh, the feeble wretches, I could have shaken them! But they only heard my laughter. They never saw my eyes, my dry, hard eyes. That is the way with us in the hotel business.

My meeting face to face with him in the bazaar and his passing by without a sign of recognition was what drove me to it. He was afoot, too, and could not have avoided seeing me. It was not as if I was badly dressed and that a recognition would have shamed him before all those grinning Chinese and Kling shop-keepers. He does not like shame, I know, and he is hard to the poor, seldom deigning to acknowledge their salutations. His enemies have said that this is due to his small beginnings; they accuse him of being "country born," of having entered the Service through some shameful influence; but I do not believe such things. They are jealous of his great cunning, which has caused him to outdistance them, of his strength.

It was this strength, his determination utterly to forget me, that made him pass me by that day, not any ashamedness in my acquaintance, such as I could see those shop-keepers credited him with. I own that then I thought as they did. The stab that it was to me ! But my face never showed any sign of pain. I set my teeth and smiled, holding my head very high, and walking without any appearance of haste through the white dust-clouded sunlight of the road, on, on, with never another look at their gaudy, pillared, evil-smelling shops, lying there in a row, their unglazed fronts crammed with goods like stalls. I chose the heat of the road, scorning the shade of the pavement, for under the colonnade of the bazaar one always finds unendurable filth, and beggars, and sore-eyed children covered with dirt and amulets. Besides, I was anxious to return quickly home, for I was hot at heart and very faint, although nobody seeing me would have thought this.

But when evening came, after some hours spent in loneliness lying in my cool big bedroom, I also had become determined. Yes ! And my plans too were made, fine plans. The difficulty lay in the first getting of him to come and see me. A letter perhaps might have done this, but in a letter I must have used some pleading.

Later, you could have seen me walking through the jungle alone. I went without fear. I was determined. Nothing would frighten me. Tigers there were in the jungle, but I cared nothing at all for them. I knew the path well, having followed it oftener than once in the years gone by ; but now it had become difficult through

neglect, a mere rut worn deep by the feet of generations, and covered in many places with thick, sharp grass. It led by dale and hill for more than a mile, perhaps, to the hut of one of the old women who had dressed me for my wedding. Others, relatives, dwelt with her, a very dark, ugly, stunted family, who mixed scarcely at all with their neighbours, but whose paddy thrived when all the other fields were dried up for want of rain. Strange people this family were, small of eye, hard of mouth, and very silent. They witnessed my arrival through the gloom with no betrayal of surprise. Even at that late hour all of them, except my old friend, were sitting outside on the patch of green, sheltered by one or two of the lofty palms beside which their flimsy reed-built hut had been erected. They informed me, without wasting a word, that the pigs had been breaking into their planting, pointing to an enclosure where were growing—so far as I could see in that dim light—tapioca and bananas, with a *durian blanda* tree or so. Although these folks said little, the old woman when she came out was voluble enough. She led me into the privacy of the hut.

I felt a fool, almost a child, when I stated my business, but she took the matter gravely and so did I too. I have always believed in magic. Did they not teach me at the school in Pelung about many devils? Now I began to believe in it more than ever. Seated in a corner of that dark, stifling hut with my back against the crackling palm-leaf wall, and my fingers thrust through and gripping the yielding split bamboos that formed the floor, I watched her figure, just visible in the light thrown by the smouldering wood fire, swaying

to and fro, bending over the handkerchief I had given her.

Later she spread a *sarong* cloth of red cotton on the floor, and drawing from dark cornices and recesses about the hearth many a weird-shaped pot of brass, packet wrapped and sewn in dirty silk, strange bean, dried root, and cunning amulet, packed them therein. At my pleading she had consented to return to the hotel with me. It cost money to persuade her. I remember how her old seamed face, inlaid with age and dirt and evil, brightened when she saw my silver ; how, though I dreaded her, with what pity I noted her scarred and knotted hands, her breast all thin and shrunken, with the skin on it forming scales, like that on the belly of a crocodile. That is how the sun treats those who have spent their lives unsheltered from the glare of it. It shrivels them.

She followed me from the hut, bending under her bundle. The men squatting outside, beyond a grunt or so, took no notice of us, and never offered to assist her. They are a strange family, but in this rudeness no worse than other natives. Hard is the lot of old women in the East.

For a week or more we waited for his coming, she spending part of every day among her mysteries. She was certain he would be drawn to us, and so was I.

And he came. Just at the same hour as formerly, at the hour when I sat in my garden beside my big green table, busy with my sewing. The hot sunlight flooded the lawn around my shelter. It had splashed through the leaves of the palms above that afternoon, and I was dappled in gold, so he said, as he took the

vacant chair. Never a word of excuse, you will notice, about his long absence ; no lies to me. Perhaps you will say he did not think I was worth them. It was, I tell you, because he knew I was too clever to believe untruth.

" You don't seem at all surprised to see me," he remarked.

I went on sewing with my eyes cast down. Eyes are open books. He was not to see their expression. But he would not have found surprise there.

" I am very glad to see you, Mr. Baylers. You come often, I think, or often as you can. You are such a busy man ; I understand that."

" Well, I have not been so often as I should have liked, Lolina," he said. " Seriously I haven't. There is no place pleases me better than this—than your company."

" But then you have been so *very* busy, Mr. Baylers," I responded, smiling in a slow, secret, knowing way, with my lips tight shut, and stitching at the sewing.

He was looking hard at me ; but my profile faced him, and that told nothing.

" I have heard all about your business ; you are very fortunate, Mr. Baylers. Oh yes, we hear things, we poor hotel-keeping ladies, we despised ones."

" You were not despised, Lolina," he whispered emphatically, bending over towards me. " It was you that despised me. Do me the justice to remember that."

And so he went on. Now he had begun, you see, he lost no time.

" You gave me no chance," he said, trying to look

very piteous. I was watching him from between the lashes of my eyes, and he guessed it, very likely. "What have I now? Everything's gone now."

"Oh, but you have been very, very busy, Mr. Baylers."

"You have heard tales, perhaps; there are always liars about," he said in a slightly harder tone. "But there is nothing in such tales, I told you that often. Except perhaps that the devil in me wanted to make you jealous, Lolina. Oh, Lolina, if you could see me walking about in torture, unable to sleep because of thinking about you!"

"Don't talk such foolish talk, Mr. Baylers."

It might have been true what he said. He was not looking well. His face had gone all pale and tallowy. There was a deadness about it that did not please me. And his eyes were yellow and baggy as any old Straits Chinaman's.

"If you don't let me talk, I shall drink," he said, picking up the bottle. He filled his glass at least four fingers. "You have something as well," suggested he. "Oh yes, you must, to celebrate my return.—Well then, some champagne."

My refusal disappointed him, and for a long time he did not speak, but sat with head bent, sipping, sipping from his glass and stealing angry glances at me just as he used to do in former days. From the chair in which I sat I could see the entrance of the hotel and the yellow pathway leading up to it. On the porch a passion flower was blooming. A pair of tiny fly-catchers hovered near to this creeper, shimmering like gold-dusted emeralds. Through the bars of the white gate

patches of road and green bank were visible. And every outline, noticeably that of the hedge in the background, was blurred and quivering with the heat. It was a peaceful day. I again felt happy, although not at rest. My thoughts were quick, cool things, like those fly-catchers.

"He must sulk. Presently it shall be different." That was one of my thoughts. There were many others.

He yawned after a while, very openly, to show how unentertained he felt, and rose. "I shall go now," said he.

"Good-bye, Mr. Baylers," I replied, rising also and speaking as if I did not care one rap. "You will come again soon, I hope, to see your old friends."

With that I withdrew my left hand from my sewing, and held it out. For the first time I looked at him in the eyes and smiled. Yes, I showed him my gold tooth then. And he took my hand. He never noticed that I had offered him the left one. He bent over it, kissed it. And he kissed its palm. Oh, my joy when I felt him do that! The old woman had told me he would, and had sprinkled a strange scent on it. After this, I noticed, as she had told me I should, a change had come over him. He spoke with passion, urging all sorts of things. He pleaded, even. Why, he was growing weak. He was behaving like Ferdinand. I had him under my control. I showed the face of a rock.

"Mr. Baylers, you forget," I said, trying to pull away my hand. "Mr. Baylers, I must ask you to go." I knew he could not, for he was under the influence of

the charm. He was as much mine as if I had bought him. And yet there are people, dwellers in cities, who do not believe in charms !

" I wish I had never come," he muttered. " Making a fool of myself like this." He flung my hand from him and strode away.

This departure of him without a sign of turning back, just as he would have behaved when I knew him first, caused me some misgivings. But the old woman was very confident. To make doubly sure she came to my room that night and wove her spells again. And in addition, my thinking and wishing through the long hours that followed all bore on his return. He must have felt this influence too. He must have dreamt of me, longed for my presence. Of course he came again. I might have spared myself a single pang about him. He knew that women sometimes are weak, that I was married unhappily, and separated from my husband. But it was the magic that weakened him.

I told him during our second interview that I hated my husband and that he hated me. It was at night ; I sat with him in the little room at the back of the bar. Both doors were open slightly to enable me to attend to the wants of any customers, and to cool the air, which all that day had been scarcely breathable.

" He would hate me worse if he heard that you were coming to see me like this," I said, smiling a little. " He wouldn't know we were just old friends, you see, Mr. Baylers. Ferdinand is a jealous fellow."

" Nobody knows I'm here, Lolina ; I walked up and slipped in through the garden."

He had no need to tell me that. My " boy " had

seen him coming across the paddy field at the back, and had hurried in to warn me. As if the Tuan Magistrate of Sudora could move about unseen!

"I can't think what possessed you to marry that fellow," he went on. "Look here, Lolina, tell me honestly what it was. You could not have cared for him a little bit. Why, he's three parts native. I can see that by his skin. Good God, I wish I had locked him up for a few months that night. It would have simplified matters."

"He was nice and kind," I replied, stumbling rather as if I didn't know how to reply without committing myself. "He had been fond of me for long. And I—I liked him. And he—was offering me marriage, when others— Marriage means everything to a woman—even to us poor Eurasians. Oh, don't you come near me. You mustn't. I am married. Sit down again, or I shall call out."

I said this last because he had risen, and showed signs of desire to put his arms about me. Once he would have done so in spite of any threats, but now he controlled himself, or perhaps the spell controlled him, and he leant against the wall, his clenched hands at his side.

"Lolina, Lolina," he whispered jerkily, his face all working and lined, "this can't go on. We can't ruin both our lives. This is the East. Can't you trust me? I'll give you anything you like to ask."

"It's too late," I said in a hard voice, looking away from him. And then, suddenly, I put my hands over my eyes as I stood there beside the door.

In an instant he had leapt across the room and his

arms were round me. He tore my hands away. He rained kisses on my lips, my ears, my neck, murmuring incoherently words of passion. His strength and——

"You mistake me," I cried, thrusting him away. "Go, go! Oh, what shall I do? I am married. I will never see you again if you are like this."

"I would marry you to-morrow if you were free, and you know it," he whispered thickly.

"I don't believe it. You are false."

"I would. I swear it. Can't you see that I am dying of love for you, Lolina? Be my wife."

"I love you too," I murmured, letting myself fall into his arms. "I can't resist you any longer." I thought he was going mad. "And you will marry me?" I whispered quickly.

"I swear it—when he is dead."

"Oh, Sidney, sweetheart! I don't consider Ferdinand my husband. I don't trouble about him. I want you. You shall marry me. I shall be your wife. Yes. I will go with you anywhere. We will go before the priest and get married. I care nothing for the law. Ferdinand in my sight is not my husband. He never was. You always were. Yes, you."

He tried to persuade me against going before the priest, saying that in the event of discovery even he, Baylers, could not save me from imprisonment. But all he said never moved me.

"This marriage with you, even if it is nothing but a mockery, means so much to me. It shall be your pledge that you will never forsake me. Little enough to hold you by. Ah, *laki sahya*, husband mine! Don't you feel my burning heart against yours? Is

this little boon too much to grant me? Ah, *laki sahya*—darling—husband!”

As he held me, as I clung to him, I could see his suffused face turning quickly from side to side like a trapped animal's; his lips were parted, showing his strong yellow teeth, his eyes glowed as a *mousang's* do in the dark. How his breast heaved! Could it be his voice, this thick, smothered, panting sound? My arms, perhaps, were choking him.

“I must—I must,” he muttered. “I promise—I must.”

CHAPTER XX

CAN you imagine me after he had gone, in my bedroom with the door closed fast, singing, and laughing, and crying, and talking, and looking at myself in the mirror? Do you know how it feels to have gained one's every desire, to join the mighty, to become the wife of a colonial magistrate and to be able to look down on all other women? And to look down on white women too, on "mems" who in years before had drawn aside their garments when I passed as though fearing pollution, or, worse still, had stopped and spoken to me with a patronising manner which a dog would have resented.

But it was not only this that made me almost silly with pleasure. No, that was the side on which the dark part of my soul rejoiced; there my thoughts were wicked, anticipating revenge. But all the laughter, and the tears, and the burning joy that never let me sleep, that almost wore me out, these came from love.

I could give rein to my love now, could summon to my thoughts the object of it, not banish him, as once I had to do, but have him with me every moment of the day and night, dwelling on his beautiful form, his thick, strong lips, his manly face. Oh, what it was to have a man to love, to feel his arms like steel, his passion fiery as a torch.

He had caged a tigress. Something in me seemed

to be awaking. What influence was it that made me return so often to the vague memories of my childhood in the mountains? It was these early scenes that now presented themselves so vividly. The middle part of my life was in my mind as if unreal. Roga himself, best of husbands, a thin, withered, sallow little man like a doll in a *wayang*, he appeared to me. It was all a *wayang*, that life, all a play. And I had been sawdust too. Green sawdust, as I once told Baylers. He swore not. He knew. He said he would make me burn. Oh, and I him too! Yes, let him come with me back to my mountains, to bare-footed freedom, to bathing in the brooks, to the smoke of wood fires, the reed hut, perched, like a golden beehive, high amid the emerald paddy fields, pools of sunlight in the untrodden forests where the creepers weave their festoons and the orchids bloom.

Sometimes I believe he felt an urging to cast away all and come. That was when he visited me in the evenings just after our betrothal, and I let him see a little of what love meant with me. Not much, of course. Just a lifting of a corner of the curtain.

Then came my journey to the next diocese.

It was necessary, according to the marriage laws, for one of us to live there for a fortnight. I had arranged with Baylers to go first. He was to join me a day before the ceremony. I left the hotel in charge of my head Chinese "boy," an old servant who has never betrayed my trust, and set out.

Very greatly and quickly have you English people altered the face of our country during the last few years. When I came to Sudora first I travelled by

sea, in a little steam-boat that seemed to be part of nature, so old and weather-beaten was it. Now I took passage in a beautiful train that smelt so strongly of your highly varnished civilisation that my appetite forsook me and for the greater part of the day I ate nothing. You have done us great honour with your trains, oh yes, and your hurryings, and your roads and corrugated iron, and your tin mining and rubber planting. You have scarred the face of our beautiful green country, you have scarred the name of our women, you have broken our men. I understand that you do all these things in the service of your god, and that your work is great. But I look out on your city from this my window at Paddington, and my heart has doubts. Heaven grant that none of my countrymen shall ever wear the look of hope departed and of misery of beasts visible in the faces of so many that pass slowly and aimlessly up and down this street.

For more than six hours I could not eat. I opened a bottle of florida water and, drenching a pocket handkerchief, bathed my forehead. Never to me had the heat seemed fiercer. It was as if the sun desired vengeance on those who had come like fowls, scratching and polluting his garden. The air was full of white dust, of smoke and cinders. The train rocked and rattled, winding on noisome and bustling like a centipede. We rushed through country where the trunks of noble trees lay cut down, strewn over blackened earth, past hills on which the felled jungle was crackling and burning, where flames and smoke flickered and wreathed against the cloudless sky. The carriage swayed to and fro, bumping me gently on the

holland-covered cushions. The sun glare poured in through every window. The closed blinds, soaked in radiance, were glowing. Intense light made visible the heavy air in the carriage, alive with motes. My head swam.

No, there is no glory left in nature where the railway passes. She wears her feathers still, but wears them as does a moulting bird. Her head hangs ashamed. And all along the way are little stations, painted red and blue and yellow, with neatly lettered notices telling my countrymen what they must not do, and that they will be put into prison if they are rude to the Kling station-masters. Yes, you have made us, and our forests, slaves to Klings.

Towards evening rain fell, coming down in heavy streams as if the clouds had broken. The air suddenly grew cool. We must have run into different weather, for when the train rushed across a great iron bridge I noticed the river underneath was swollen and stained red with surface water from the clay of the hills. And the night set in very dark.

I slept uncomfortably, leaning against my travelling basket. Next morning we reached Pelung.

It comes to me, as I begin this part of my narrative, that I must be very true and sincere, concealing nothing, if I would win the sympathy of women for the woman who now was treading her perilous way. Will you call the way crooked, will you condemn me? He loved me, yes, I swear that. I had held him in my arms. It was only because my skin was a little warmer tinted than his own that he feared to face public opinion and treat me with honour. Perhaps it

will be said : " She ought to have left Sudora, gone away, hidden herself." But I loved him : every fibre of me loved him, every fault in him. Why should I give up my life ? Listen now. Had he made advances to me openly, asked me to marry him openly, and married me, thus of his own will injuring his prospects for ever, I should have rejoiced still, but he would have been no longer exactly the same to me. For the man I loved had a heart of stone, not of toffee that my tears would melt ; it was his strength, his cruelty, ambition, ruthlessness, that made him what he was. Will you hate me for saying that I would not have him changed, that my Malay blood leapt out to the tiger in him ? If you do, *tid'apa*, no matter !

Pelung in the morning, when the sun has risen above the hills on the other side of the strait, is like a pleasant garden on a summer day in England. Green turf, shaven carefully as a palace lawn, is everywhere. One looks over the hotel balcony and sees acres of it stretching from the red smooth road almost to the casuarina trees that line the beach. The eye returns for rest to these trees, and lawns, to the old grey church standing so peacefully apart in the middle of the green meadow : the eyes of the old, perhaps, never wish to leave these sanctuaries. But to the young, to the stranger, it is Pelung harbour, the roads, the sea, spread out for miles, a glittering plain of blue, with the hills in the background faint as smoke, that must always win the first glance, and the second, and the third. They tell me that in this harbour the vessels of all the world sometimes meet. Here one can see all the peoples, hear all languages spoken. You gaze at the

big steamers coming in—whence? going out—whither? the grey war monsters floating still as crocodiles, and the multitudinous white sails of the distant fishing fleet. On the right, many-windowed and golden, stands the city, square and strong as if eternal, yet delicate of outline against the sky. And always gardeners in bright clothes are watering the paths, the ferns, the palms, always in the morning is present the scent of verdure, and of freshly moistened earth.

It made me glad, as I leant on the stone parapet outside my bedroom, to behold once more the grandeur of the world. In Sudora one is in the midst of small things, one views every occurrence as through a microscope. I could not help laughing and thinking to myself that Ferdinand in a city like Pelung would be of little more account than an ant. And yet in Sudora he was large enough to marry me!

Later in the day I hired a rickshaw and drove to the Kampong Selim. Our way led us through the centre of the town. What a noise and bustle! Three times as many rickshaws and gharries about as there used to be; processions of white and Eurasian people under the hoods going to their offices; but not so very much noise, because of the rubber tyres. All this city was swelling and growing because of the rubber; these great new stores, with so fine windows, because of the rubber; these beautiful ladies descending from carriages and motors, because of the rubber. They did not look at the poor woman in the rickshaw. How could they know that she was to be married to a colonial magistrate, and would, in a few days, be able to order them hither and thither? Their airs and graces, their

dainty trippings disdainfully by the shopmen, made me smile.

But the native quarter and the kampongs seemed unaltered, unless it was perhaps that they wore a dingier air than when I last had trod their streets. I dismissed my rickshaw, and joined the throng on the pavements, walking slowly through all my old haunts, looking very carefully up at the windows, into the open shops, at the passers-by. Scarcely a face I knew. Men's lives are short in those busy, sun-battered hives. The same gilt signs were over the shops ; the red and white paintwork seemed much as ever, no fresher, no older ; the evil smelling dried fish, the curry ingredients, the beans, buttons, bootlaces, soap, looked to me no different. The opium dens, the gambling houses, all were going on as before. It was the shops that never died, not their owners.

Then I came to our own street, where I and my sister had lived, and saw—why should I have been sorry ?—the house which had been our home during those shameful years. The walls had broken, showing the red bricks. And the tiles were half off the roof. There was a fruit-seller at the corner, at whose stall I had often spent a cent or two. He did not recognise me, of course. He called me “ mem,” and talked to me willingly enough, wondering inwardly, nevertheless, so his eyes told me, at such a magnificent lady being in that part of the town. Ahmat, he said, was dead, and his wife was dead, and her sister (that was me) was also dead. As for the child, he did not know. People had told him—— A sudden look of suspicion dawned on his face. “ I don't know,” he ended.

"I know Mat Seyd took the child to Sudora and sold it there," I said boldly.

"I don't know." You see, he thought I was a mem.

"Stupid fellow," I said. "Come, here is a dollar. Tell me where Mat Seyd is to be found, and you shall have more."

Had he known who I was, he would, of course, have told me instantly ; but I did not want to be recognised. I had to bring out four more dollars before he became talkative. But he did not finger these dollars until he had earned them thoroughly. I made him lead me up to the place. How the people stared at me as I followed him through the streets.

Mat Seyd, when we came to him, did not stare. It was not his way. You see, he was brought up to be a gharry driver and thus became accustomed early to meeting all sorts of people. Nothing ever surprised him. And he was very quick to perceive. Me he recognised in the first few minutes after the fruit-seller had left us. But still he went on flicking the flies off his little pony and eying the grand white hotel opposite. None of the passers-by could have told from his appearance that something rather strange and interesting had happened to him, that this magnificent lady was an old friend. He was changed. The sun had burnt him the colour of mahogany. Small-pox had pitted his features still more and made his left eye white and blind. It was not difficult for him to avoid showing by his face what he felt. He said :

"If you do not wish others to hear, sit in my gharry, Si Oya."

How strange to hear my child name again. It sounded sweet enough. I should have liked to pat and fondle this burnt-up, lanky, dear old man. There were small gold rings in his ears like your sailors wear sometimes, and the *dustar* on his head was vivid red. Even at this late day he had an adventurous look.

"Al-lah ! Thou art rich, little Si Oya. And thou followest the customs of the mems !" He leant on the window frame and eyed me curiously.

"I am no longer Si Oya," I told him, smiling. "Many things have changed, Mat Seyd. I have thrown aside the Prophet Mahomet and entered Christian."

"Who can understand the mind of a woman ? " he said contemptuously.

"Long ago I was baptised," I added. Do you know, I felt ashamed of having forsaken Islam. We were silent.

"He was a great man, was Ahmat," he broke out as if compelled to give voice to a thought. "Al-lah ! never have I met such a gambler."

"And his boy-child ? "

He did not answer, but looked at me sharply.

"It was thou who took it to Sudora," I went on like a flash. "Thou always wast clever, Mat Seyd. And thou leftest the amulet on its arm. But why leave Ahmat's child with a Portuguese Eurasian, Mat Seyd ? " I said all that to him, not knowing, merely guessing. Had he thought I knew nothing for certain, he might not have disturbed my ignorance.

"He was not Ahmat's child," he contradicted impatiently.

"So thou sayest. But of that, no matter. It is so long ago now. Everybody has forgotten."

"We left him with his own blood, among the half-castes, among the *serani*," he continued, his face lighting up with merriment. "Al-lah, these *serani*, fatheads all! Every one laughed at our selling of this infant, when we sold him in a bag of rice to them, receiving one dollar more than our lawful due. Al-lah!"

He held on to the gharry, which rattled as he shook with merriment. I laughed too. I had not heard before how they had disposed of Ferdinand.

It was pleasant to meet this old friend. He and his gharry were always to be found at that rank, he said. I gave him money and told him we might meet again. He did not ask about my doings. He thought perhaps, knowing how my sister had lived, that his questioning might bring blushes. Or was it that he felt no interest in one who had left Islam?

Later, when I passed by in my rickshaw, he contented himself with raising a hand in the *tabek*, and giving me a knowing smile. He did not appear anxious for further speech. You see, that man has had so many adventures.

Time and again in my goings about through the streets I saw afar off the white convent where my early years had been spent. This home of mine, at any rate, had not changed. The same green creepers clung about it, the same green trees shewed above the high garden walls. I wondered if the bell handle was

hanging at the side of the old yellow door as it used to do. As a child the longing to pull this handle and see what happened had been almost irresistible. I still itched to do so, but the thought of the questionings, confessions, and other sorts of petty inconveniences that the renewal of old acquaintance means often, kept me back.

Besides, I had much shopping to do, plenty of other things to keep me busy, until the steamer sailed for Tramatu, where I was to be married.

I have been open about all my employments in Pelung, and have mentioned the convent particularly, because Baylers believes to this day that the presence of two of the holy sisters at my wedding was due to me. He was annoyed about their presence because he wanted, so he said, to keep our wedding a great secret from everybody, so that I should incur as little risk as possible of being arrested for the crime of bigamy.

He was afraid for me, he said, thinking of me always. You see, he loved me and would not have had me come to any harm. I explained to him that all these holy sisters are trained to know that it is their duty never to gossip about anything. But still he was annoyed rather. How absurd to think that I should have arranged for these two ladies to be present !

Soon, however, he had forgotten all these little vexations. We went to the mountains for our honeymoon. Yes, I took him to the mountains, not mountains so wild as those among which I had been reared, but wild enough for us then. Our bungalow

stood lonely at the edge of the forest, and we bathed in brooks and slept under the light of the stars. For a fortnight we were free.

Then alone, as I came, I returned to Sudora.

CHAPTER XXI

WHEN the stage is bare for the moment of its more important actors, there is time for a glance at the ruddily-peaceful village scenery, at the painted sky, the ballet, the chorus of villagers, young and handsome, old and impossibly gnarled, like the canvas tree-trunks in the wings.

How they whisper, these people, gathered together in twos and threes, with the local busybodies threading a way amongst them. Clearly it is the hush before the storm. We hear, faint and ominous, the first rustling of the wind, the patter of raindrops on fallen leaves. Somebody points towards the village inn close at hand. Alarm for the fair fame of the heroine fills us all: the peace of the elaborate sunset is for ever spoilt.

Real life, however, has a wider stage. Fate has not the same skill as the dramatist in presenting its audience with a series of thrills in concentrated form, and neither, to mention a small matter, does one as a rule find the male villagers outside the inn talking to their wives. They will be found within.

But although dramatists do not tell the exact truth about existence, although draughts of love, passion, hate, joy, and so forth are offered to most people in a state of extreme dilution, nevertheless, in real life as on the stage, every heroine has to be careful of her fair

fame, which is liable to be attacked at all times, whether she has lost it or whether she has not.

In such matters East is as West.

Listen to the talk of the kampongs where women stand in the wind and glittering sunlight, and, with heavy poles used javelin-wise, pound steadily at the pools of yellow paddy in the hollowed, squared logs of hardwood, husking the food for the day.

"Have you heard what Abang Kadar says?"
Punch—punch.

"No. What?"

"He says that people are whispering that the missie with the yellow hair that is working at the Tuan Pawker's plantation——"

"That missie which the Tuan Magistreet has thrown away?"

"Yes, that one." Punch, punch. "She is already engaged in a new flirtation. With a small Tuan."

"Who says so?"

"Abang Kadar. What sort of missie is this? She likes to eat out of a coco-nut shell. Pah! They are all the same, these 'mems.' *Apa machem, apa machem!*"

Punch—punch—punch—punch. Fowls approach jerkily and timidly, and are driven away by a little naked boy, a boy who possesses a stomach like an alderman's.

The faint, disconnected sound of an accordion comes from the door of one of the yellow huts near by. Other women, sitting on the raised shelter over against the banana patch, weave reed mats industriously. In the near distance, half concealed by the sugar-canes, is

visible a brown-skinned ancient dressed in blue dungaree. With a gleaming of wings, a pair of *tiangs*, most faithful among the birds, flutter across the limpid sky. They also are talking: "*Apa machem, apa machem!*" Yes, it's a terrible place for scandal, is Sudora.

The interest of most of the inhabitants just at that time was being expended on the doings of the young lady with the golden hair, but there were a few who, for reasons of their own, kept a weather eye open in other directions also, and kept it open day and night. As Mr. Fernandez confided to his better half, a man may wear steel-rimmed eye-glasses, and yet be able to see through a brick wall, provided people are foolish enough to leave a crack in it.

He was lying on his long chair at the edge of the veranda when he said this. Every afternoon, nearly, found him there, with Mrs. Fernandez in another chair beside him. It was on these occasions they held their privy councils, watched by the setting sun, a sun which now was casting a benevolent ray or two on a very tidy garden where, under the palms, two young people, hatless and jetty black of hair, walked slowly up and down. These young people now and then, without apparent intention, approached almost as close to each other as the Siamese twins. After one of these momentary contacts they sprang apart like electrified pith balls.

"How fond you seem to be getting of gardening these days, Ferdinand," the girl murmured, in slight confusion.

"This is my Garden of Eden, Amy."

"Oh!" She walked a little faster. Then: "That bunch of bananas is ripening fast, Ferdinand."

"Anything would ripen if it saw you, Amy. Even a cheese would. It is all because of your beautifulness. It makes the birds sing, and the hens lay eggs, and the bees hum, and a rainy day dry up pretty smart. I myself——"

"Hush, hush, Ferdinand. You mustn't talk to me like that. You're married, you know," said the girl, in an alarmed way.

"Oah yess, I know," he cried helplessly. "Throw my wife at my teeth. Jump on me. Pull me into little pieces. Jist like I am a weed in the garden. Oh, Amy!"

"No, you're not a weed, Ferdinand. But you——"

"I will be your puppy-dog——" he began.

"Not a weed," she went on timidly. "But a marigold. You married gold, you see. Oh, I am so sorry for you."

"Whatt, you—you sorry?"

"Yes, yes."

"Then I doan't care. Dig me up well round the roots and the marigold will grow into a sunflower yet."

She made a gesture of dissent, and walked slowly on, her head bent.

"I don't wish you to be a sunflower," she remarked after a while, interrupting his eager whispers. "Once before you were a sunflower and then you turned away after that Miss Hamilton. She was the sun."

"But she kicked me on the stalk and I came down wallop," he cried, gesticulating. "I assure you that, Amy. Amy, she is no more to me now than beer is to

a teetotaler. The very recollection, Amy, brings on a cold shudder."

"Ferdinand, you mustn't speak of this lady like that," said the girl reprovingly, but allowing a faint look of pleasure to shew for an instant nevertheless.

"When I'm in love I don't measure my words. No, Amy, there's nothing mean about me. I will lay on your feet my whole dictionary. I feel the English language bubbling out of me. I dam it with clenched teeth but still it pours through the cracks."

"I expect you said just the same to that Miss Hamilton," murmured the girl. She stopped near a cleodendron and, turning away from him, plucked a spray of the small red blossom and placed it in her waistband. In the mellow sunlight she appeared cool and youthful enough. Her loosely cut white dress lent grace to her broad figure.

Ferdinand, gayer in costume than he had been for some time past, was, on the contrary, warm and greasy-looking. As regards grace, he seemed to have taken as a model one of those wooden toy figures in which the pulling of a single string works every limb, eyeballs included. The victim of a multitude of emotions, he strove valiantly to give all of them adequate expression.

"May every hair of my head turn into a porcupine quill if I did!" he said intensely, after a great effort, in answer to the unkind remark about Miss Hamilton.

"Well then, what did you say to her?" asked Amy, looking very curious. "How did you talk to this missie?"

"Oah, I just talked about the weather," explained Ferdinand, ceasing his gesticulations. "Saying it was

a warm day to-day, miss, or I doan't like the look of that cloud, madam, what! what! Just like that."

"But there must have been other things."

"We talked a great many talkings about our friends in London. About the barmaid at Willie's, to which His Gracious Majesty the King has just granted an old age pension, and about these chestnuts that are now allowed to come out into the parks. You heard about thatt occurring in London?"

"No."

"I been thinking about it, and I doan't unnerstand why they didn't let them come out before. Everybody ought to be allowed to come out into the parks. England's a free country, but what with the labortories and the conservatories, who are always quarrelling in our parliament, hitherto I surmise the chestnuts have had a bad time. But I expect His Most Gracious Majesty the King has been inquiring into their case, and has told them: 'Just you go out and stroll about in the parks when you want to, and don't take any notice of these political bounders.' I don't know why anyone does take any notice of these political labortories and conservatories, when, as an old friend of mine just out from home told me the other evening, while we were absorbing refreshments, there is only six of one and half a dozen of the other, an equal minority, as you may observe, Amy. But perhaps my politics bore you?"

"What do you say, Ferdinand?" asked the girl, looking bewildered.

"I was only speaking in the colloquial, of course,"

he explained with a smile at her puzzled face. " You see ' bore,' well—when we bore peoples—well, we just bore like we bore a board, on and on and never stopping, with the same old borer, and it is the same with the pig animal, called in the colloquial ' wild boar,' because he has tusks to bore a hole in his enemies, and he bores along the ground with his snouts, trying to get at the young coco-nuts. And from this we derive boaconstrictor, a snake who earns its living by winding itself round wild boars and suffocating them, and also the boa like a snake which we find wound round the necks of so many English women, but which, I unnerstand, is merely hung there alle—allegorically."

" But didn't you speak of anything more to this Miss Hamilton ? "

" ' Allegorically ' is a nice word," he went on hurriedly, " used immensely by the American nation, being derived from the reptile alligator, or crocodile, and paregoric, a chemical consumed by infants who wish they had not eaten so much. So we obtain the figure ' allegoric,' that is ' a disgorging crocodile ' who has eaten too much, or has been a pig, that is to say, a boar, or wild boar. We students find this English language so wonnerful, Amy. Such a hanging together language. But shall we retire up the stairs to the house, and see what our old folks are up to ? "

Linking his arm in hers he led her not too slowly across the lawn, and, avoiding a further direct question by a reference to the lateness of the hour, piloted her on to the veranda.

The old couple were still in the corner. In spite of

the now rapidly deepening twilight, benevolence combined with a certain amount of satisfaction was to be read in their countenances. Mr. Fernandez, with his white coat open showing his narrow chest covered with a yellow balbriggan singlet, was lying back in the long chair, half-way through a second cigarette.

"How many do one and one make, Amy?" he called out when the girl approached.

"Why, two, of course, father."

"They do in arithmetic, my dear, but not in matrimony."

"Oh, father! Don't be stupid!" Mrs. Fernandez laughed.

"I read it in the wedding service," continued the old man, chuckling. "Have you read the wedding service, Amy?" And seeing his daughter's confusion he went on, looking more pleased than ever: "Anything you don't unnerstand, Ferdinand will tell you all about. He is an expert on wedding services, are you not, Bird-in-hand?"

"I wish you would not call me Bird-in-hand," responded the expert gloomily.

"Call him 'Lolina's Love Bird,' father," spluttered Mrs. Fernandez. "Oh dear me!" She flopped down on her chair, shaking with laughter. "Oh, you stupid fellow!"

"Great Scott and Dickens! Am I never to be immune from your irritating chippings?" screamed Ferdinand, in a frenzy. "I wish I was dead! Give me a carving knife, and let us end all this!"

"You can't have it. It's out in the kitchen being cleaned," the old lady said angrily. She sat up,

sobered, and began mechanically to wipe her eyes on her sewing. "Can't you see a joke, stupid fellow?" she went on. "Such a thin skin as you have!"

"She was laughing at me, wasn't she?" Ferdinand said, when the old gentleman, after the women had left the veranda, took him to task for showing such bad temper. "Making me into a laughstock! Always she does this!"

"Laughing at you!" The old gentleman's tone was very contemptuous. "You may think yourself lucky, young man, that people take sufficient notice of you to laugh at you. If you go on as you are going, soon they will pass you by as dirt in the roadside."

"Why—why should they do that?" exclaimed Ferdinand in intense astonishment. "Me! Dirt!"

"The Chinese towkays have no opinion of you. I hear that everywhere," went on Mr. Fernandez in a serious way. "Why don't you try to be quieter and more like us, and then people will like you? Suppose something happened and you lost your work with me? What then?"

"I would go under Government," muttered Ferdinand sulkily.

"They wouldn't have you, make no mistake," returned Mr. Fernandez. "Your dressing up and your antics have spoilt your chances. It is there that you make a laughstock among the Europeans."

"I'm as good as they are, although my skin is different," screamed the youth in momentary passion.

"Oh no, Ferdinand, you are not. It's stupid to get such proud ideas. They have money and power, and

what have you? You must be different. All this foolishness of yours must stop."

"In London I should be just the same as a white man," muttered Ferdinand savagely. "We may be seen going about the streets there arm-in-arm with mems and missies. They even like us better than the white men, so I have heard. And as for barmaids——"

"Don't talk more," interrupted the old man, with an air of finality. "I thought after the misfortune of your marriage you had turned over a new leaf, but now you are going on in the same old way again. Your foolishness is hurting my business. If it does not stop you must go from here altogether. The Europeans are talking. They know more about you than you think."

"What can they know about me?" asked Ferdinand. An expression of pleasure, born probably of the thought that he had succeeded in arousing the interest of the great, flitted over his features.

"They know a lot. I can tell you this. It surprised me. They are talking about your birthmark."

"Never!" cried Ferdinand, jumping up from his chair. "They cannot be."

"Mr. Baylers the magistrate was, anyhow," went on the old gentleman in a convinced voice. "He knows everything about you, seemingly. It is wonnerful how these Government gentlemen find out things. I didn't tell you. I didn't want to worry you. It was when I went to the Government offices to see about getting more work. Mr. Baylers won't give us any more work. He doesn't like you, Ferdinand. He says you are a bad hat, and that he's heard a lot about

you lately. 'Tell your son from me, you old rascal,' he said, 'that he's got one blot on his 'scutcheon and that I shan't forget him for it.' "

" 'On his cutchem' ? " Ferdinand looked alarmed and also mystified.

" Some new English word for the leg, I suppose," said the old gentleman. " They always seem to be getting new words. They call a mouth a 'kisser' now in London, I unnerstan'. But you're more up-to-date in these matters, Ferdinand ; don't you know the word ? "

" Oah yess ! I know the word," said Ferdinand. Nevertheless he exhibited signs of hesitation, and for a while sat silent, growing gradually paler. " Cutchem, cotchem, catch 'em," he muttered at last. " Catch 'em, cotch 'em, cutch 'em. You see, father, when you want to catch 'em, or cutch 'em, you must run after 'em, using your legs. Therefore the leg may be called the catch 'em or cutchem."

" Dear me, what a language ! " gasped the old gentleman.

But Ferdinand's face was growing ever longer. " I shall be a laughstock," he muttered. " That woman, my reported wife, must have been talking, betraying my secrets."

" Somebody must have been," agreed the old gentleman.

" Did this Baylers fellow mention whether my birthmark was on my left cu-cutchem or my right ? " asked Ferdinand, with the air of a drowning man grasping at a straw.

It appeared from the old man's answer that the

magistrate had evaded a test of the exactness of his knowledge by pointing to the door in a manner not to be denied.

On hearing this Ferdinand exhibited faint signs of hope.

CHAPTER XXII

IN the bungalow among the rubber trees the days were brighter now than ever they had been since Una came. Baylers had taken the clouds away with him. And also, Lloyd, a frequent visitor, seemed to be doing well at his work. Samuel Pawker had indeed told Una, with a confidential wink at his wife over the table, that he was entirely pleased with the way this new assistant was shaping.

Una had noticed the wink as was intended. Her face had lighted up in answer.

"He's what we call a born planter," Samuel Pawker had explained. "I understand some of his family have been in the gardening line already ; so it runs in the blood." And seeing her puzzled look he had gone on : "Adam, you know, was one—ha ha ha ! Got you that time, Una."

"You did," she had admitted, laughing too.

"Why don't you throw the breakfast things at me ?" had continued the successful joker.

She had felt inclined to do something good-humouredly desperate. So did every one when Samuel started joking. But she felt that in a world short of sunshine, it does not become one to be too insistent on quality. They all laughed at him, or with him, what you will.

All was well with the rubber world. The share

market was on the rise, the older rubber trees yielding latex by the gallon, the estate No. 1 crop fetching top prices in Pelung. No wonder that Samuel's face wore a perennial smile nowadays, and that Mrs. Pawker talked as if the date of their retirement for the East was already fixed, that Sallie junior bloomed out into raiment more gorgeous than Joseph's.

Samuel just about this time gave Una a rise in salary, chaffingly making a condition that she should not object to this new assistant, Lloyd Guiy, visiting the bungalow, even before breakfast, whenever he chose to do so. She thought afterwards that she had met the offer rather ungraciously. People meant well, but they were often terrible busybodies. It occurred to her that perhaps on the whole Lloyd had been visiting her rather too often. She felt happy as she was and did not want to hurry events. The next time he came she showed him a certain coolness. She let him infer that perhaps he took things rather too much for granted. She reminded him that he was still on trial; that he must not take her for granted, that she had not yet granted herself. In consequence Lloyd went away looking miserable, and the next day seems to have been so busy brooding over the past that he holed out and planted half an acre of rubber trees eighteen by eighteen instead of sixteen by sixteen. Samuel caught him at the sixtieth tree.

It was about this time, too, that fresh rumours concerning the magistrate penetrated to the bungalow.

"One hears all sorts of things," said Mrs. Pawker. "No one expected him to be away so long. Is it true the Governor has detained him for special work at Pelung?"

"I don't fink," retorted Samuel with a knowing smile. He left them, walking in an exaggerated manner on tiptoe, one finger against his comical mouth, his whole expression hinting broadly at a mystery.

Rumour, as hinted in the last chapter, was just then more than usually busy. And while the noisier section of the countryside told tales, often scandalous to the point of libel, concerning the golden-haired governess, a quieter group, composed of petty officials, half-castes, and Chinese people old enough to scent a profit even in a love affair, had for a long time been keeping a shrewd but respectful eye on their new magistrate. In the opinion of this group all bachelors were either mad or immoral, and most European bachelors were both. They suspected their magistrate of being both: the petty officials were certain of it. Who but a madman, they argued, would make a practice of walking about the town during the night and awakening suddenly with violence and abuse Government night-watchmen? They did not like such proceedings. A good night's rest was the birthright, they muttered, of every night-watchman throughout the East. Who but a madman would expect the office punkah puller to pull for more than ten minutes on end without a rest? Clearly to do so was immoral. "He must be stopped," they had told each other apprehensively, even after the first taste of the new-comer's quality. "He is possessed of a dangerous devil."

And they had proceeded to pigeon-hole every bit of news they heard about him.

His meeting with Una on the steamer had put them

off the scent at first. Many such meetings had they seen before, and each was the herald of a wedding : for what other purpose would this golden-haired female have travelled ten thousand miles ?

Later, the Chinese " boy " at the Pawkers', interrogated on coming in to the bazaar, had stated positively that the female in question was learned in reading and writing, and had been engaged to teach his master's little girl.

In spite of the gambling affair, Mrs. Roga in the beginning had succeeded in avoiding their notice, the hotel being rather out of the way, and, to risk rudeness, her age being against her. But later, the magistrate's frequent visits to that palm-sheltered hotel garden aroused suspicions, suspicions which observation duly confirmed. This madman, then, was engaged in a dangerous intrigue with a married woman in direct contravention of the Government regulations. And this was the person who wished the native clerks to work overtime ! For such a man the sleep of the night-watchmen was being disturbed. A pestiferous state of affairs necessitating that every native clerk should do his duty, a duty rendered extremely onerous because of the Governor's known habit of ignoring anonymous letters.

And so, in the cool, punkah-swept offices, out of rickety bungalows where even the traveller palms were tattered, lurking by dusk behind the scented hedgerows, there came to be watchers, noting every visit to the quiet hotel, every movement of its inhabitants, noting every movement of the great though utterly impossible madman who presided or thought

he presided over the destinies of Sudora, seekers of evidence against him.

How it got to be known in the town that he had taken passage to Tramatu instead of staying on in Pelung with the Governor hardly needs explaining when one remembers that the custom's clerk at Sudora has a brother in the Secretariat. Easy it is also to understand that a rumour should have been spread about that the suspect had been accompanied on the voyage by a heavily-veiled Eurasian woman, in whom all without being directly instructed at once recognised the erring hotel proprietress. "And this the man who expects us to work overtime for nothing," exclaimed the chief clerk when the news was brought to him. "Ha ha, master! We shall see some things!"

Una did not hear these rumours, but she gathered from Samuel's air of mystery that the great magistrate had been getting into trouble somewhere, and hoped devoutly that the still greater powers that reigned at head-quarters would resolve to give Sudora a change of government. Absence had not lessened her feelings against the man. The fear of him remained, drugged for the moment only by the pleasure which her closer intimacy with Lloyd had brought her. Often in the daytime when she sat on the small side veranda allotted as a schoolroom, trying to teach a very hot and moist little Sallie how to spell and write, she would find herself gazing out past the shadowy eaves on to the level clearing and the great plain of forest beyond, with eyes that saw, not that which was before them, but pictures conjured up by thoughts concerning this man and his mysterious hold on Lloyd and the Pawkers.

She used to smile when roused to reality again, resolving to defy enervation and the climate and keep her intelligence awake, at any rate. But few are the brains which keep athletic in the East.

Presently her doubts as to whether this enemy of them all was ever coming back to Sudora were put at an end. Invitations to a tea-party—which Mrs. Pawker insisted on calling a *conversazione*—to celebrate the opening of a new tennis court, were to be issued. Una had to write them out. At the head of the list the name of the magistrate figured. She could not resist a comment. “It’s bad news for us all, I know,” agreed Samuel sorrowfully. “But the beggar came back yesterday. If you miss him out we shall all lose our jobs, and probably be struck by Government forked lightning. Anyhow, let’s hope he won’t come. He doesn’t seem to have much use for this part of the world nowadays.”

Mrs. Pawker echoed: “Let’s hope he won’t come,” in tones not so emphatic perhaps as those of her husband. “It would be like his cheek,” she added, “after giving us all the go-by as he did. So pointed it has been.”

“And the worst of it is we have to be nice to him, because of that business of the lease,” chimed in Samuel, looking at Una apologetically.

“He is being good about the lease,” admitted Mrs. Pawker. “After all said and done, he is the representative of the throne in Sudora, and I don’t feel it my place to be rude to him.”

That was all the conversation, but unspoken thoughts about their prospective guest spoilt gaiety in the

family during the next few days. Baylers' note in answer to the invitation arrived at the last moment. He intimated that Government business would probably prevent him from coming—Samuel read the note aloud at the table—and there was a postscript in which warm and polite messages were handed round to all, including Sallie junior, for whom, it seemed, he had brought back from his travels a present.

“Well, that is kind and thoughtful, anyhow,” exclaimed the mother, her sallow face momentarily aglow. “He can't be so bad. Perhaps he is mending.”

Una hardly slept that night. She felt for many undefined reasons disturbed and—and——

Why should she be afraid? Freedom of action remained with her always. The Pawkers plainly feared this hateful magistrate. That was their affair. Perhaps he could ruin them by cancelling the lease. They said as much. Poor kind people! But that was their affair. She declined suffering for them or Lloyd. If she wished she could run away, even, and leave them all to find a way out of their troubles. She supposed Lloyd would have to go to prison for this mysterious offence of his. If she really made up her mind to treat Baylers as an enemy, Baylers would certainly fulfil his threat. What crime Lloyd had committed she did not know. Something to do with gambling and that dreadful half-caste woman, so she believed. She did not care to probe his secrets. He had not given her his confidence. If they had been engaged, properly engaged, she would have had some right to ask him. She thought: “It was wretched of me, that day, telling him that he was still on trial, as though

I were his judge, when all the time I know, and he must know—driving him away like that ! I am always so hesitating ! If—if——”

She tried to persuade herself that the danger of Baylers existed in her imagination only, and toward dawn had almost succeeded. Sleep then overtook her. Thoughts became pictures. That meeting with Lloyd in the woods when for once in their lives they both for an hour were bold, unhesitating ! In her dream she saw herself and him. The background of jungle ferns and trees showed indistinct, seemed changing always. Now it was what looked like a tennis lawn. Always the sun was shining. She sighed as if in enjoyment, stretching her limbs.

CHAPTER XXIII

“ **T**HAT dreadful half-caste woman ! ” Reader, this female named Hamilton was referring to me ! Mr. Nubkins, the novelist, explains that she was dreaming when she said the words and was not really responsible. He advises me not to cross out the sentence from my novel. I agree with Mr. Nubkins. Let my readers decide between this woman and me. Have they ever caught *me* dreaming in such a spiteful way, exposing evil thoughts ? Half-caste indeed ! At least I knew what I wanted and took it without any hedging and hesitation. This Hamilton woman, as you have seen, gentle reader, is of the kind that does not know how many lumps of sugar she would like in her tea.

Baylers never wanted her. Why should he ? It puzzled me for a long while to understand what reason he had for even bothering to look in her direction, much less visit her. I understand why it was now. You see, very soon after my marriage I found out something.

My marriage ? How did it answer, you want to know ? When torches unite, what is left at the end of the honeymoon ? My husband came but irregularly to my hotel after his return. This was as arranged. We had kept our wedding secret and intended to do so until Baylers had received the promotion he expected

from the Governor. But it was not arranged that so very quickly his passion for me should cease, giving birth to nothing but disdain, to half-veiled slights, to contemptuous words about Malays, spoken in the presence of me, his wife, whose better part is Malay. That was not arranged, oh no! As for my passion for him—well, in the face of this treatment it ended in yawning. Yes, a week after the honeymoon there I was lying in my long chair, yawning in his face.

"If you feel like that I can take myself off," he snapped, getting up and walking away a pace or two. My right hand, which he had been holding as if in duty bound, dropped slackly. I made it. I yawned again, straining every fibre in me to do so.

"You are very dull sometimes, Sidney, my friend," I murmured. "The Governor and these fine ladies of Pelung, that you tell me about always, do not find you dull, I know that. But I do when you talk of them and praise them. It makes me want to go to sleep."

Yes, so cool was I outwardly, lying there under the lamplight, my white wrapper around me, my hair all coiling down, my large eyes fixed in amusement on him as he stood there in the shadow. It was late at night, so late that I knew he would not go. How still the darkness is in that hot Malay land! One listens to the swish of wings as the bats wheel by. The rustle of a nut-raiding squirrel in the palm trees sounds startling in its intensity. One hears and sometimes counts the beatings of the heart.

I heard my heart that night and feared that he might hear it too. But he is so easily irritated by me, and

anger, I think, makes the blood rush in a tumult to his head, deafening him.

"I think I will go," he said, looking at me indecisively. Then he walked out on to the veranda and presently I heard the gurgle of a bottle.

"No, I don't think I will go," he said, coming back after a while.

I do hate the smell of brandy, in spite of my business. He took up my listless hand again.

This conversation occurred, as I indicated, only a week after our honeymoon. I give it as a sample. Some people, reading this story, will say: "Poor woman." These are stupid. Why? Well, we all know that a husband can't be sent back to the shop and changed. He may not be everything we expected, yet we must try and wear him somehow, if only to disappoint the neighbours. Only stupid imagine women must needs throw away misfits.

"Sidney," I used to say to him very often, "you are a silly fellow. We get on very well, you and I, but don't drink so much brandy." I could not get him to stop drinking brandy, and sometimes in the morning he was difficult to rouse. It was my duty to get him up and away before the dawn so that nobody should see him pass from the house or suspect our relationship. Trying days these, I found. But I consoled myself, thinking: "Later on, later on."

I did not suspect that so soon after marrying he would have thought of another woman. He seemed tired of me at the moment, but I argued: "That is the way of all men." Love that isn't a habit is of little worth to women. Those of us who, knowing these things, see

their husband's love ebbing, sit down on the beach and wait for the turn of the tide, instead of following with a pail, as is the custom, I notice, of many foolish English ladies.

But if another woman draws him away one needs must run, not taking a pail but a big, thick stick. Hit her how you can. Never trouble to fight fair.

If you are cool and firm all will be well. You will defeat her and remake him prisoner. Especially easy is it when the husband drinks brandy. Then he has two men inside him to deal with, the weaker of which the stronger is ashamed to disown. The weaker is passionate and goes to sleep instead of acting. The weaker is generous, or careless of money ; call it which you will.

I do not intend to infer that Sidney is a mean man. He is not. He gives me everything I want. Then, even at the time of this low tide of love, after our honeymoon, money was nothing to him. He handed to me often packets of notes and handfuls of silver dollars. The difference was that, after his visits to the veranda mentioned just now, he often forgot to count the packets of notes, but would take them from his leather pocket-book and throw them carelessly on the table before me. I did not like gifts made thus and would not turn this senseless way of his with money to my advantage. Many packets of notes handed to me I replaced in the leather pocket-book after he had gone to sleep, and he never knew, departing in the morning with scarcely a word for me, bloodshot of eye and ready to quarrel bitterly with the chief clerk at the office.

There were other papers in the leather pocket-book,

but of course I never read them, although I had many opportunities.

Only once did I read something. That was a yellow cablegram that dropped out and opened itself so that I could not help reading it. Anyone would have read it. There were twelve words :

Baylers Prentah Sudora. Godmother dead new will she gets everything best luck.

You have seen those buff telegram forms with the red print and the blue carbon writing? No? We think nothing of them in the Government. Even at that time I thought nothing of this cablegram and folded it up unconcernedly. I did not know what it meant. Now I do.

You will picture me, gentle reader, sitting there patiently beside the turned-down lamp with the leather pocket-book hidden in my lap, arranging slowly those packets of banknotes, with my husband lying on a long chair just outside the circle of light, sleeping heavily. Yes, lying sprawling on his back, his mouth open wide, his scanty hair wildly disarranged, trickling with sweat, there he was, mine. Yes, I was the wife of a colonial magistrate. And nobody knew it but me.

Even the chief clerk at the Government office did not know it, and if ever there was a clever chief clerk, the one at Sudora is ; too clever altogether, my husband, the colonial magistrate, says. You see, when my husband came to Sudora he found quickly that this chief clerk, a man who has been in the place many years and who lives in a fine bungalow with two wives,

was making money by bribery. My husband is always finding out things like this and getting hated. It seems to me so stupid to interfere with the customs of the country. One might as well root up the coco-nut palms and plant pine trees.

This chief clerk, a thin man who wears blue spectacles, was now in the habit of calling at my bar and drinking glasses of lemonade. He was very polite to me, but I could see his cunning eyes behind the blue spectacles, watching.

Once he asked me if I knew Tramatru. I replied that I had learnt geography at school and left him quickly to attend to another customer. This chief clerk made me nervous. He is so clever.

There must have been some conspiracy afoot, I am certain of that. As for my husband thinking that he could keep our relations hidden, anyone who knows Sudora will laugh at the idea. Why, the very rats and the bats and the squirrels were treating me as a queen. People drew back respectfully, like dirt from a broom, as I passed along the streets ; and more than one important Chinese shopkeeper, Ah Fat the grocer, for instance, addressed me openly as "mem." No, one cannot keep love connections hidden in Sudora.

But this chief clerk wanted to make mischief, I am sure, and so did others ; and many were in the habit of cross-examining my servants. That is why I use the word "conspiracy."

I do not say that they suspected my real relationship with Baylers, but they thought that matters between the two of us had progressed to a point from which it would be difficult for us to turn back. They hoped

for an elopement. The following incident shows this.

One beautiful morning I had a visit from Mr. Fernandez, the father of young Ferdinand. Poor old man, unhappily married, as you who read between the lines of this story already know! He also, I could see, was a conspirator. Poor old man!

"Come out into my garden, Mr. Fernandez," I said, "and we will sit under the coco-nut trees and have a nice long chat."

Luckily I had just put on a clean white blouse and was looking very young and fresh, so my mirror had already told me, that morning. And he told me too that I was looking very young and fresh.

It was not surprising that he should have thought me fresh and lovely, like a new-plucked hibiscus, and should have been unable to refrain from saying so, coming as he did from such a stale bread-crumby bungalow, from the embraces of that dirty-necked female.

"I am glad you think so politely of me in spite of all this worry about your Ferdinand," I returned, smiling. I poured out his brandy and soda, waving the "boy" away. Such a beautiful morning! The soda water bubbled and sparkled in the sunlight.

"It's turning my hair grey, all this trouble," I went on. "He is a deceiver, I am afraid, is your son, Mr. Fernandez," I smiled. "Like his father," I finished deliberately.

Of course he had to smile back. He tried to hide his face behind his big glass, but was unsuccessful. "Ferdinand is such a stupid fellow," he muttered, when he had finished refreshing himself.

"If I'd known about this birthmark, Mr. Fernandez," I went on, amused inwardly, but wishing to emphasise the fact that it was from my choice we had separated; "if he hadn't deceived me about that, if it had been broken to me gradually, things might have been different. As it is——"

"The boy can't bear the mention of this birthmark," he explained, defending Ferdinand. "He is so sensitive. He feels it to be a mark of his shame, especially now that he knows more about himself. I believe he would die if the people of Sudora got to know about this birthmark, Mrs. Roga," he went on in a quavering way. "Perhaps I was wrong in not acquainting you that there was a drawback in the shape of this mark before the marriage."

"You were," I cried, trying to look much hurt.

"It was difficult to acquaint you about it, and I didn't think you would mind. I admit my guiltiness." He said this in a very courtly way. They are so polite, these high-born Portuguese.

"And there is something else which I ought to have told you, but which I only hinted at," he went on feebly. "While I am now on the subject, I take my opportunity for apologising for that also."

"What?" I asked, guessing what was coming, prepared to look very surprised.

"Ferdinand is not our son," he said in a low voice, avoiding my eye in a shamefaced manner.

"Not your son!" I jumped up. "Mr. Fernandez! Do you disclaim relationship? Are you ashamed of him? Who is he then?"

"His birth is wrapped in mystery," murmured the

old fellow. He did look ashamed of himself. I was sorry for him, but necessarily I had to be angry.

"I'll thank you to do something else with your foundlings than marry them to me," I said sharply, and sat down again.

He couldn't look at me and couldn't speak, apparently, although he cleared his throat more than once in an attempt to do so. Oh, I was very dignified. Never a word I said for quite a minute, but sat there still as a statue. Then I began drumming the table.

"It doesn't matter—what do I care? Nasty, thin, cantankerous boy!" I muttered at last, breaking the silence.

"You are not fond of him, I know that, missis," he ventured, nervously smoothing the top of that weather-beaten solar topee of his. Oh, Mr. Fernandez, you cunning old fellow!

"Now, dear Mr. Fernandez, tell me this—no, no, don't trouble more about your hat but look straight into my eyes, Mr. Fernandez, honestly, and say whether you yourself would keep fond of a deceiving boy who has no evidence but a disgraceful birthmark that he has ever been born at all?"

He put on his eye-glasses and tried to look at me firmly. "I do assure you that poor Ferdinand——" he began, but he couldn't go on. He took off the glasses and wiped them. "One can get fond of anything in time, missis. Once I kept a pig for killing, but couldn't kill it, we got so fond of it. It died of old age, and what with the doctor's bill for it and the doctor's bill for curing Mrs. Fernandez's grief, I was

terribly out of pocket with that pig. Oh yes, I was, I assure you."

"I asked you, not about fondness for your pig, but could anyone be fond of this Ferdinand?"

"There is one young female that is. I know her!" he cried unguardedly.

I was surprised, but did not believe him.

"Does she know about his birthmark?" I asked quickly, and laughed outright at his expression. Plainly she did not.

"Anyhow, missis, you are not fond of him," he remarked, recovering himself.

"Who can fathom the heart of a woman?" I teased. "Oh, Mr. Fernandez, you don't know us women. We're wicked people. I—I didn't know I had a rival in my affection for Ferdinand, Mr. Fernandez."

He started feeling his head with one hand, and I took up my sewing and worked away very cheerfully, humming to myself some simple tune. "Tum-tum-a-rum-tum. Tum-tum-a-rum-tum," I hummed gaily. He raised his head, about to speak, but still I hummed: "Tum-tum-a-rum-tum."

"I hear our worthy magistrate, Mr. Baylers, intends to become engaged to that Miss Hamilton, and visits her every afternoon," he said, mildly venomous. "All the people of Sudora will rejoice, sure is that."

Oh, my surprise! I stopped humming. I raised my hand and smoothed a stray lock of hair that had fallen over my forehead. My heart, I felt it, took on a suffocating beat.

"What?" I said at last. "Oh, there can be no truth in that, Mr. Fernandez. That stupid girl! I'm sure he does not like that girl. Such stupid talkings and rumours get so often about the town."

"Well, perhaps you know better than me," he said, smiling mildly.

"Don't believe such things," I said. I got up. "You wicked old man to spring such false news on me," I thought, watching him. There could be no truth in what he said, I was certain of that. If there had been visits to the rubber estate, well, a colonial magistrate must be civil to the people in his district. That would explain such visits.

"It is funny there is no truth," he went on obstinately. "So many things make one think there is. Mr. Baylers is being so very nice to the manager of the estate, Mr. Pawker, I am informed by the chief clerk, and has smoothed over many difficulties about the lease of his rubber land; and also that young gentleman, Mr. Lloyd Guiy, was, more than a fortnight ago, suddenly and without notice sent down by Mr. Pawker to Pelung for a month in order to engage coolies and ship them on from there to the estate. Ferdinand saw him going away in the steamer. Every one in Sudora now believes that this Miss Hamilton, as is natural, would like to marry Mr. Baylers, and not this Mr. Guiy, and that she got Mr. Pawker to send Mr. Guiy out of the way."

"How stupid people are in their gossiping," I said quite coolly, looking straight in front of me.

"That is so," he admitted. But a smile flickered on his lips for an instant as if he meant to add: "You

are alarmed in spite of all your acting. I can read you."

Oh, the wicked old man! I was getting angry.

"And why do you tell me all this?" I asked in my sharpest tones. "It may be true, perhaps it is, what you say about this woman. She is a treacherous creature, I can tell you that, Mr. Fernandez. Not that I care!"

"She will succeed," he said very earnestly, rising also and leaning over towards me, his two old hands on the green table. "Yes, yes, let me tell you this, Mrs. Roga. I have my information from many sources. Do not forget that she is very young and very white-skinned, this Miss Hamilton. Another who is her rival is not so young. I should advise this other if she wants him that she must risk everything to gain him, everything. And now I will say good-bye, Mrs. Roga." He held out his hand.

"I wish you would advise this rival yourself, Mr. Fernandez," I said. "What is the good of advising me?"

"I have my reasons, missis," he responded. "Good-bye." He was dignified as an imaum.

Oh, what a wicked old man! He was ready to do anything for Ferdinand and that daughter of his. He was even advising me by hints, as you see, to run away with Baylers so that Ferdinand could get a divorce. What surprised me in all this tangle was that Ferdinand had never told anyone that I was his aunt. And yet it will not on reflection surprise those who knew the fellow. You see, all the Eurasian young men will do anything rather than be made laughing-stocks of. Also,

as I afterwards discovered, he had still an idea—I had it too, as you know—that by your English law a man who marries a near relative is liable to a long term of imprisonment. Yes, motives enough he had for secrecy in his own opinion, be sure of this. But what his motives were did not make any difference to the feeling of gratitude I now experienced towards him. If he had revealed our secret I should never have become the wife of a colonial magistrate. Oh no, Ferdinand, you are not all bad. Sometimes, unintentionally it may be, you exhibit good points. In that you take after your reputed father, this old man, this unscrupulous old fellow who was giving me, as I say, for his own purposes, advice to elope with Baylers.

There he stood before me, this wicked old man, with his hand stretched out, his eye avoiding mine. “Good-bye,” he said again, “good-bye, and remember my advice, Mrs. Roga.”

But even then I did not at once take his hand, because I was thinking how I could repay him for this wicked advice. At last I said, looking away so that he should not see the twinkle in my eye :

“Dear Mr. Fernandez, let us talk plainly together.”

He bowed. I could see that he looked slightly puzzled.

“I am in the eyes of the world your daughter-in-law,” I went on. “And, yes, I will say it though I blush, I have always rejoiced that this is so. I am glad when you come and see me. You are so like my late husband Roga.” I caught up his hand and held it in both my own. “Dear Mr. Fernandez, I am

sorry, so sorry about Ferdinand. I know he wants to be free to marry this nice girl, and you also wish him to be free ? ”

“ I do,” he muttered uncomfortably.

“ And shall we promise each other to do all we can to make him free ? Will you help me, dear Mr. Fernandez ? ”

“ Yes, yes, certainly,” he said with much earnestness.

“ I shall have to elope with somebody, somebody whom all the town respects. I shall sacrifice myself. There will be a great scandal, but Ferdinand will gain his freedom.”

“ Mrs. Roga,” he said fervently, “ you are a noble creature. Yes, I should advise you to elope with him.”

“ I know you like me, or I should not have the courage.”

“ I do. We all do.”

“ What will your wife, the good Mrs. Fernandez, think about what we propose to do ? ”

“ She will bless you,” he responded, looking upwards.

“ Dear, dear Mr. Fernandez,” I mused, stroking his hand. “ Oh, you do remind me so much of my late husband Roga. And Ferdinand and Amy will be happy, and Mrs. Fernandez will think I am a noble creature, and you, I am sure, will worship me. Yes, I will do it, yes. Mr. Fernandez, darling Mr. Fernandez, I will make a sacrifice. Ferdinand by our united aid shall obtain his divorce. Mr. Fernandez, elope with me ! ”

Oh, he was astonished, was this stupid old man ! And angry ! He was worse than angry, he was very rude, not at all like a high-born Portuguese. He

hopped away from my embrace like a grasshopper from a mantis, and ran across the lawn to the gate, with his topee waving in his hand, as though somebody had suddenly wound him up. Every time I picture his hurried figure, his bare, bald head bobbing up and down against the sunset, I burst into chuckling. He looked so very indignant, this stupid, dear old conspirator.

I did not see him again for months.

CHAPTER XXIV

EXACTLY what Mrs. Fernandez said to her husband during the night after his interview with Mrs. Roga let the walls of their bedroom at the Grotto for ever smother. In times of his bachelorhood, days of freedom, hours light as thistledown, he had wondered perchance at the skill exhibited by the pulpiter in preaching for hours on any tiny text. A miracle, however, is apt to become wearisome when one has occupied a bedroom with it for a generation. But if he wished sometimes for a partner who had a little less to say, to do him justice he never showed it, and would arise in the morning after a sleepless night, perspiring slightly, collected albeit rather pale, to go calmly through the rites and ceremonies of another day.

One of the earliest of these rites and ceremonies was, naturally, breakfast. Then, flanked by his children, he would watch his spouse handle the teapot, hoping devoutly that she would not throw it at him. She had not done so yet. Indeed, only once during all his married life had he been constrained to duck. And that had been also because of a woman.

Who would have dreamt that the mere narration of his daughter-in-law's offer to run away with him should have aroused so much ill feeling? Why should

his wife have hissed : " I wish she would, treacherous wretch ! You must have been flirting and flirting and perhaps even more so ! " Sleep ! One might as well have tried to float on a fountain.

On one point they were agreed. As Mrs. Roga, (or Fernandez junior) did not look like breaking her bonds, the present relations between their daughter and Ferdinand must come to an end. Much of late had these young people affected each other's company. The curb was needed. The cultivation of a garden, purest of human pleasures, might plainly enough lead to occupations more human and less pure. " But not bad," the old lady had told her husband, towards morning, discussing the matter. " They don't mean anything, the poor innocents. It's just the love blossoming out ; and now we have to snip it in the bud, as the poets say. Why didn't you take my warning and do a bit of snipping before, Mr. Fernandez ? Didn't I say to you a hundred times in this very bedroom that I'd rather boil myself alive than see our Ferdinand married to that woman ? "

Her husband had only yawned wearily and turned over on to the other side. And in the morning he had arisen as always, pale and collected. After breakfast he beckoned Ferdinand aside.

" Two evenings ago I saw you with your arm round Amy's waist in the garden," he observed severely.

The young man hung his head.

" It has got to stop."

" Father ! " cried Ferdinand, looking up hopefully, " that's what I intend."

" I doan't mean the arm has got to stop where I saw

it, stupid fellow," explained Mr. Fernandez. "You've got to stop putting it there. Now mind that."

"But I've got so into the habit, father," Ferdinand pleaded. "And Amy, she says she likes it. She says that she likes to feel I am her sole means of support. We don't mind waiting for something to turn up, the toes of my late wife, if possible, but insist on waiting affectionately."

"Nonsense," returned Mr. Fernandez very sternly. "Mrs. Roga is not your late wife. She is your present wife and as far as I can gather does not intend to be anything else."

"How can she be my present wife when she is at the hotel and I'm here?" burst out Ferdinand indignantly. "She is not my wife at all, I swear all my oaths that she is not. She is—" he checked himself. "Oh, miserable blighter! And she knows all my secrets," he wailed, wringing his hands. "Father, she is—oh, I shall be a laughstock!—I can't tell!—Amy, I love her—we are getting too old for giving each other up."

"You must; you must stop all this nonsense. You must give her up and go away to Pelung, and get a job there."

"I won't."

"If you don't then," said Mr. Fernandez, in a threatening voice, "I shall at once inform all the town, Amy included, about your dreadful birthmark. So you had better think it over. Your mother and I have decided on our steps for stopping you."

"You would reveal my birthmark to every Tom, Dick, and 'Arry! Oh! You would split on my secret to Amy and make her sniff at me. Oh! You call

yourself a father ! Oh ! ” He snatched up his topee and rushed towards the door. “ You are more like a farthing than a father ! I defy you as man to man ! ”

He rushed from the bungalow along the path, through the decrepit garden gate and out into the world, into that smiling, slothful, tropical-scented lane leading townwards, the only bad-tempered thing in it that morning. He turned the corner of the main street, running as hard as ever, head low, eyes on ground, and at once butted into another moody looking creature, a creature bucketing along in the opposite direction, a European clad in immaculate white. A European !

Quick as the dropping of a dog’s tail was the flight of Ferdinand’s rage. He raised himself painfully from the ground, his eyes downcast, his lips busy with broken apologies.

“ Unavoidable hurriedness of modern life—damnable punctualness of railway officialdom—impossibility of catching express trains after they had started——” Fragments such as these fell from him, as still bent low he brushed his soiled extremities.

“ Catching a train, Mr. Ferdinand ? Why, from the speed you were going along just now I thought you were a train ! ” said a pleasant voice above him.

“ Mr. Guiy ! ” exclaimed Ferdinand in astonishment. Immediately he became erect. “ So you are the subject of my friendly encounter ! Great Scott and Dickens ! ”

He stooped again to recover his topee from the gutter. “ Lovely morning,” he remarked, once more erect. “ I trust I see you keeping fits ? ”

"Oh, I'm all right, thanks," returned Lloyd. "Well, I mustn't stop you from catching your train." He made to move on.

"Not a railway train. Trying to catch a train of thought, mister," explained Ferdinand after a moment's hesitation. "My brain's all been blowing about owing to shocks administered among the family circle."

"What, are you in trouble?" The young planter's voice seemed sympathetic.

"Never out of it, mister," Ferdinand assured him.

"We all have our ups and downs."

"Yess," objected Ferdinand, in an aggrieved voice.

"But some people have their middles also. I have no middles and I also get bumped at both ends. It is a shaking experiment, I assure you."

"Oh no! I'm sorry." They walked slowly along the lane together.

"I might as well be a bottle of doctor's mixture," muttered Ferdinand, his mind still on the subject of ups and downs.

"What's the matter? Can I help?" asked Lloyd, putting his hand on the young fellow's shoulder.

"There are worries connected with several ladies," explained the unfortunate miserably. "What with one and the other my time's not my own. I get accused of being a married man at the wrong moments. This also, of course, goes against the grain."

"Oh, ah. It's too bad," muttered Lloyd vaguely. He took away his hand.

"Relations appear and disappear. I find myself now in a state of orphanage," continued Ferdinand,

in ill-used tones. "Aunts spring up in a single night. They don't disappear. Doan't you find in London, Mr. Guiy, that aunts are a terrible sort of creatures?"

"Mothers-in-law are supposed to be so: I never heard that said of aunts," replied Lloyd, smiling faintly.

For a time there was silence. The two strolled slowly on. Ferdinand took out a handkerchief and mopped his forehead, stealing the while timid glances at his unconscious companion.

"The trouble we had in our family with a female aunt five hundred years ago, Mr. Guiy, you would never believe it," he began firmly, breaking the silence. "You see, Mr. Guiy, this aunt went and married her nephew. It was a terrible accident on both sides, and they found it out directly after the wedding, but she would not let her nephew say anything about it for fear of her becoming a laughstock, and he didn't."

"What a joke!"

"A joke!" exclaimed Ferdinand in horror. For quite half a minute he regarded his companion doubtfully, then he went on: "Mr. Guiy, let us suppose you had been that nephew and that the law was the same five hundred years ago as we have it now, that is to say, you are always sentenced to five years in prison for marrying your aunt. Let us please suppose this and also suppose that you were in a boiling state of love for Am—for a beautiful young lady. How would you get out of such beastly holes—er—five hundred years ago?"

"Yes, but in the first place I should not be sentenced to five years in prison for marrying my aunt by

accident," retorted Lloyd, looking amused. "It would be different, of course, had the nephew known what he was doing."

"Oah, he didn't know, I assure you of that, swearing solemnly," cried Ferdinand.

"Well then—er—no harm done."

"But they would both also be laughstocks!"

"Not they, I think. People wouldn't laugh at a thing like that," returned Lloyd. "And what if they did?"

"It would be hard to bear," muttered Ferdinand. He stopped short in the shadow of a clump of palms. "Mr. Guiy," he asked intensely, "will you take oath that if an Eurasian nephew in this country marries his aunt by accident he will not be dropped on by policemen?"

"Well—er—if you want me to," Lloyd returned, looking surprised at such an exhibition of anxiety. "Er—certainly—of course he wouldn't be dropped on."

"Thank you. Thank you, mister."

"You seem to be worried about this ancestor of yours."

"It's the aunt, not her sister," corrected Ferdinand.

"My greatest comfort, however, Mr. Guiy, is to hear that this nephew would not be dropped on."

They strolled along and presently came to a garden gate, all feathered round with grass and ferns. A plump young Eurasian lady within glanced up and, with a half-scared giggle, turned and fled.

"My abode, mister," said Ferdinand.

Lloyd remarked that it was a pretty place.

"So—so," Ferdinand agreed. "That young lady is the daughter of the proprietor of the bungalow."

They leant on the gate looking at the bungalow. It was rickety in appearance and surrounded with blossoming shrubs.

"It is called the Grotto," vouchsafed Ferdinand. "Some European hard-up owned it before my father the present proprietor. This European fellow said he called it the Grotto because he always found himself stony while living there, alluding, I have no doubt, to our garden, which is, so my spade informs me, a nesting place for small stones. But by perseverance I and the daughter of the present proprietor have ridded it of the stones."

"You seem to have made it very nice."

"I shall now enter," Ferdinand said, gravely polite. "And—wouldn't you like to see this garden, Mr. Guiy? Or perhaps you have immediate business elsewhere and would wish to remove your person?"

"No, I should like to look round," Lloyd said, going on to explain that he had an engagement in the town later, but would be very glad to pass the intervening time in such a pleasant spot. With a flourish, Ferdinand opened the gate.

"We have flowers, as you may perceive from our labels, mister, all sorts of flowers, the great, the humble," he observed, escorting his guest round the narrow beds. "We have, however, no society distinctions in the vegetable world. The common or garden onions grow next door to our friends the flowering sweet peas. Beans and nasturtiums embrace the same stick and climb up it every day. I myself

once had my society climbings, but I'm finished. Nowadays all I want is quiet. I should like to be a flower growing quietly in this garden. I would even consent to be a peaceful onion if people would only let me be quiet."

"It all looks very nice," said Lloyd lamely. "Don't your fowls spoil it? There seem to be a lot about?"

"Ha, mister," laughed Ferdinand, "they did. They were devilish busy, scratching and scraping all over our beautiful beds of seeds and what-nots. But I also was busy, you can wager your tall hats on that, ha ha! I sprinkled all over the beds with the cayenne pepper-pot. Some of these chickens got sore eyes, Mr. Guiy, ha ha! They found I was a bad person to cross, ha ha!"

"They must have, indeed. You are an ingenious man, Mr. Ferdinand."

"Yes, sir," asseverated Ferdinand, suddenly grown ferocious. "Some of we Eurasians are peoples of devilish ingeniousness; and also, mister, of devilish passions burning within us. Yes, sir." For a moment or so he stood in silence. "Our outsides look just ordinary. But if you Europeans could see our insides, ah, you would receive a scare, I assure you. Chickens are not the only things that find us bad persons to cross. There are others, others in high positions. We are watching them, ha ha! We are getting information about them!"

Suddenly he stopped, caught his companion's arm and drew him closer. "Mr. Guiy," he hissed, "there is one person in this town who has been doing nothing else but crossing we Eurasians. He is a devil. To

illustrate : he drives about in his buggy all day long pursuing ladies. We find him at a certain hotel pursuing ladies ; the sight makes our gorge rise within us. We find him at a certain bungalow still pursuing ladies, beautiful young ladies with golden hair recently disembarked from Europe, to give no further indications of their whereabouts to a blind horse of your ability. Mr. Guiy, between you and me and this adjacent coco-nut palm, the career of this blighter of a magistrate is about to be brought to a dead stop."

"Do you mean Mr. Baylers ?" asked Lloyd, his air of lethargy gone.

"No names, sir," whispered Ferdinand intensely, holding up a warning hand. "Let us call the person B. Let us inform all whom it may concern that a petition to the Governor praying that this person B. should be summarily removed from the locality of Sudora is now in process of being signed by a number of influential Eurasian gentlemen, of whom I am one. Yess, I assure you. And also to whom it may concern, the said F. Fernandez, being on the committee, will be pleased to receive all testimonials from sundry giving news that this person B. is a disgraceful."

"Is that so? By Jove! Well, I shan't be sorry if he's moved, for one."

"Mr. Guiy, I have my note-book," whispered Ferdinand. Loosing his grip on Lloyd's arm, he produced a cheap pocket-book and a large pencil, the end of which he wetted carefully. "Now, I pray you, any information that will help the community to sit on this contemptible person."

"Oh," said Lloyd hesitatingly, "I know nothing,

at least nothing definite. I hear vague rumours. It is pretty well known, I think, that he has more than one blot on his 'scutcheon."

"Whatt!" screamed Ferdinand, jumping. "Mr. Guiy!"

"It's quite right. What do you look so surprised about?"

"I thought you were making me a laughstock," muttered Ferdinand, who had been gazing at him, red of face and unbelieving. "But I see your reliableness. Great Scott and Dickens! I never dreamt of this fellow having blots on his cutchem."

He wrote in the note-book. "How many blots shall we say? You are unaware, I perceive. Call it two, to avoid exaggeration in our petition to the Governor."

Heedless of Lloyd's mystified countenance he bent his head and made another entry. "Information of extreme helpfulness. Many thanks," he said, closing the book. "I am pleased to hear of these blots on his cutchem, Mr. Guiy," he said, strolling on. "I think that will cook his goose for him with our worthy Governor. Oah yess! And also with the ladies, who, we will take care, shall obtain early particulars."

"I don't know anything definite," Lloyd said uncomfortably.

"Doan't you worry, mister," said Ferdinand, in confident tones. "You can leave that to our committee." He changed the subject by asking his guest to inhale the scent of a big *crinium asiaticum*.

However, a little later on he asked in studiously casual tones:

"Are there many people in London with birthmarks on their cutchems, Mr. Guiy?"

"Birthmarks on their— Oh, I understand," said Lloyd, enlightened. "What an original way you have of putting things sometimes! You mean, of course, the bar sinister. Oh yes, any amount of people have. Many of our dukes. Half the nobility. Why, I have one myself."

"Whatt!" exclaimed Ferdinand, looking more astonished than ever.

"It's a fact," Lloyd answered him with a smile. "I can understand your surprise. I suppose we ought to feel ashamed, but as a matter of fact we are rather proud of it in our family. Bad lots, are we not?"

"Your family proud of this birthmark on your cutchem?" muttered Ferdinand in a dazed voice.

Lloyd nodded.

"A duke walking about your House of Commons with a birthmark on his cutchem?"

"Yes, why not?"

"Why not?" muttered Ferdinand stupidly. "Why not?" For a few seconds he stood there looking at the ground, his features working; then raised his head triumphantly. "Yess, Mr. Guiy. Now I consider the matter, why nott? We ourselves prize a tortoiseshell cat, then why not a man with a birthmark on his cutchem? Answer me thatt! He ought to be prized, should such a person. I myself have always been of that opinion."

"It's kind of you to say so."

"I am doing a double kindness," admitted Ferdinand generously. "I personally——" He checked himself and looked at Lloyd Guiy in momentary suspicion. "Mr. Guiy, these are blessed remarks you have been

making. I cannot conceal the fact that your ideas on the subject of a man with a birthmark on his cutchem have raised high hopes in my bosom," he went on, apparently reassured. "Would you mind just stepping up the steps on to the veranda and breathing a few of these remarks into the ear of the proprietor of the bungalow? He's been worrying for years all because—er—that nephew five hundred years ago, I informed you about, had a birthmark on one of his."

"Why, certainly," said Lloyd, rather surprised. "If you think it would please him."

He made towards the stairs. From behind the chicks of the veranda came a rustling and a noise of scraping chairs indicating that the inmates of the bungalow had been watching his movements and now were making hasty preparations for his reception.

CHAPTER XXV

“**A**ND do you credibly inform me, sir,” inquired old Mr. Fernandez, sitting perched on the edge of his favourite long chair, a skinny elbow on each skinny leg, finger-tips pressed together, “that an English aristocrat considers a birthmark of the nature of a bar on his cutchem to show he has royal blood in his families?”

“Well, not exactly that,” replied Lloyd, who had been in cross-examination now for at least five minutes on the subject of heraldry. “Er—I should hardly say that, but——”

“But you have on yours,” broke in Ferdinand, his face glowing with triumph.

“That’s so,” admitted Lloyd.

“Now I will pose you another question. We have a gentleman with a birthmark on his cutchem and he enters Willie’s or another of those famous houses of calling for drinks in London. Would the barmaid, knowing what he has, ignore him, or would she receive him with friendly spirits?”

“It certainly would not go against him with a barmaid,” replied Lloyd decidedly.

“There, father,” cried Ferdinand, snapping his fingers in delight. “There!”

“You certainly have relieved my mind and the boy’s here, Mr. Guiy,” admitted the old man.

"I'm very glad," Lloyd said, getting up. "It's funny, finding people out here so interested in heraldry. You ought to get a book on it, Mr. Fernandez." He made to move towards the door.

"Oh, mister, doan't go 'way," Ferdinand cried exuberantly. "You doan't know how happy you have made us all. Amy, mother, here, quick! Come to see Mr. Lloyd Guiy! Mr. Lloyd Guiy, stop!"

And at his call out the two ladies came in their best attire. They must have been waiting close at hand. Ferdinand danced into the centre of the veranda.

"I present Mrs. Fernandez, wife of proprietor of bungalow," he shouted, waving his arms. "I present Miss Amy Fernandez, daughter of said proprietor. But I do not present her for keeps! Oh no, not for keeps! We know more than one thing or two, Amy, yess, five or six! Oh, I could jump for joy! I could hit my head against the ceiling! Look at me, Amy, British nobleman, so I am certified! Ha! ha!"

"Oh, do shut up and behave, sir. You'll frighten Mr. Guiy!" cried the old lady, whilst Amy disappeared into the dining-room. "There, sit down on this chair. Don't hop about like a hopping bird."

"Hopping bird!" said Ferdinand. He sat down at once, mopping his streaming face, and was quiet for a few minutes. But when Amy came back with a tray covered with glasses and bottles of lemonade, he burst into activity again, and with many a bow and caper handed round the drinks.

"I doan't know what is the matter with him to-day," whispered the old lady apologetically to Lloyd. "He

always does get excited when we have company, but now he's off his head completely. If he jumps about like this the bungalow will be shaken down about us."

"Perhaps I'd better go?" suggested Lloyd.

"Oh no, sir. I didn't mean that. I like your staying."

And so he stayed, sipping his lemonade and stealing curious glances at his dusty whitewashed surroundings. But presently a phase of silence and awkwardness came over the group; he caught Ferdinand signalling stealthily to the young person known as Amy, he intercepted a nod that the lady of the house clearly had intended for her husband. Plain enough that the family were waiting for his departure. When he arose they did not press him to stay, although all were vociferous in bidding him to come again often, often. Ferdinand especially was prominent in his offers of hospitality, prominent also on the steps waving a handkerchief in farewell. But the moment the young planter was clear of the premises away went the handkerchief, away the society smile.

"Father! Mother! Amy!" He turned round, holding out his arms to them all. "I feel like a sort of fatted calf just come back," he went on.

"What's all this talk about the birthmark?" snapped the old lady. "Who cares about the stupid thing? Only you, you silly baby! Here, finish your lemonade and let me get it cleared away!"

"This is no time for lemonade or such trifles," said Ferdinand, in portentous tones. He strode to the centre of the room. "Saved at last!" he cried,

waving his arms. And then joy overcame him, and seizing Amy round the waist he began to dance.

"What's up with the fellow?" screamed the old lady. "Leave go of her instantly! Father!"

"I have the pleasure of announcing to the general company present," yelled Ferdinand, still dancing, "thatt this female hotel-keeper, known as Roga, is not my wife but my AUNT!"

"Your AUNT!"

"Yess. She is my aunt!"

"Hold him! He's mad! Leave go of her waist!" cried Mrs. Fernandez, dashing into the fray.

But half an hour afterwards Ferdinand still held the waist. And now he held it by permission of the authorities, who sat peacefully in a corner together gazing on these young dearest ones of theirs with happy eyes.

"Hopping Bird! Hopping Bird!" murmured the old man. "I knew he would hop back, missis."

And the young fellow by way of reply said tenderly: "Amy?"

"Yess, Ferdinand."

"No longer will I be a hopping bird, I swear that! I want to be more like an onion, growing always peacefully in the one place, with you beside me, a smaller onion."

"Oah, Ferdinand. But I doan't want to be an onion!"

"I was only talking idiotically," said Ferdinand.

CHAPTER XXVI

“**A** CALLOUS woman,” perhaps some will say, “to joke and make fun at that half-caste gentleman Mr. Fernandez, at a moment when she had just become aware that her husband was untrue to her.”

I ask such people to suspend judgment until they have read this book to the end. Yes, I care for their judgment. What people think certainly does not matter to me, the wife of a colonial magistrate. But to me, the woman, it matters. Read this chapter and the next. If then your verdict is against me, I bow my head.

When this old Mr. Fernandez had gone, fleeing through the sunlight like a bat from the day, I walked slowly into the hotel looking perfectly composed, then slowly upstairs to my bedroom, and sat down in my favourite chair.

Every one who has been so long at the hotel business as I have has learnt to look perfectly composed, yes, even in the face of a husband's desertion. Some I have known to be also inwardly peaceful under such a catastrophe. But I could never, I am sure, join the ranks of these. The blood of the Malay turns hot to whiteness at the appearance of a rival; the fury of a woman of my race scorned is seldom passive; it urges revenge.

As yet, it is true, I did not know for certain he was false to me. But everything pointed to the fact. "What shall I do to her for taking him from me? What shall I do to her?" I muttered as I sat there staring into my mirror, white and scarcely seeing.

How dishevelled was my hair! How parched and worn my face! The hand too on which my head rested seemed bloodless. For a time also my brain was numbed and incapable of thought and my heart almost ceased to beat.

And then gradually my senses returned. I noticed the warm, sparkling flood of sunlight without, and rising, put my hands out of the window and bathed them in the heat.

There was my old familiar garden, bright as ever, the vivid turquoise sky, the graceful palms. There was my dear old shady lawn and the green chairs and tables where my late husband Roga so often sat. At first the scene was detached like a picture, no longer part of myself. But, as I looked, the spirit of it entered into me and I became calmer. Gone, I knew, that old comfortable life. Baylers had come, bringing me passion, gratifying my ambition. I was the wife of a colonial magistrate; no one, not even she, could destroy that fact. "For the time she may have attracted him," I thought, becoming calmer, "but he is always bound by marriage to me. You, Miss Hamilton, may share his vice, I am sole partner in his hours of virtue."

But this reflection was not entirely satisfying. "What can he see in her?" I muttered, and strolled over to my mirror. I was pale, true, but so was she nowadays, probably with longing for him. Mine

was the pallor of old ivory, rich and healthy : hers the pallor of linen. My eyes were dark and lustrous, the glass told me, hers a feeble blue. And my hair, my features, my figure—what could have attracted him from me to her? Well, had I not known that men were funny creatures, I should have said, as I looked in my mirror, that rumour this time had lied, that I need have no fear. But men are sometimes won over by jades who offer them shamelessness and impudence in place of goodness and beauty. So every one knows in the hotel business.

I doubted him. Nevertheless that hour spent before my mirror did bring me confidence and consolation. I left the bedroom calm.

My husband did not come to the hotel that night. Had he done so I should have said nothing to him that would have told him of my suspicions. It was better, I knew, to seek information in quiet corners and not to have quarrels with husbands. But where to find out concerning this Hamilton woman? I could ask the servants. This is not nice to do, and also servants in the East, if you ask them a direct question, are apt to give an answer which they think will please you, which may not be the true one.

Often one hears gossip at the hotel bar. I listened attentively that evening, but my customers talked about other things and I gained no information. "*Tid'apa* ; no matter," I said to myself. "Tomorrow I will find out whether this old Mr. Fernandez has spoken truth." I went up to bed and slept very comfortably.

The next morning I got up and dressed, thinking

coolly. After breakfast I called both my servants into the bar room to assist me in giving the bar and the bottles a thorough cleaning and polishing. This was a work that my late husband Roga had always taken great interest in and insisted on conducting personally. I had followed in his footsteps and made a practice, when cleaning day came, of giving the servants my assistance.

It was a bright, sunny morning and we all worked well, I, of course, wearing my old blue cotton frock which I did not mind getting dirty with water and the dust. How they chatter, these Eastern servants, when they know their "mem" does not mind it! But it does not do, as I say, to question them direct. They become suspicious and close up like flowers at night. I listened to their careless chatter, rubbing away at my bottles. My late husband, Roga, did like to see everything shining: he would never let me stop oiling my hair. Ah, when I think of him and his affection and little politenesses, so different to what I get now——!

The servants chattered about many things, but only once did they interest me enough to make me stop rubbing. It was something about Ah Ming, the Pawkers' cook. He had asked for a rise in pay, I gathered, as there was much more work to do there now owing to the Tuan Magistrate staying so often to dinner. Mr. Pawker, very angry, had refused him.

So what the old Mr. Fernandez had told me was like truth! My husband was very often there to dinner! I could have stamped my foot, but instead I listened, beginning to rub angrily at my bottle. "These

houses containing many women are wretched places to work in," commented my cook. He didn't think I heard him. "Ah Ming tells me that lately matters are made much harder for him at Tuan Pawker's," went on the other. "The mem there, who once cared nothing about cost, now checks his account and is angry at the slightest overcharge. And the new teaching missie nowadays also is easily irritated, and weeps often, sitting in her bedroom. Ah Ming has peeped through the crack and seen her at it." "A rotten lot they must be," was my cook's comment. I quite agreed with him.

What was this Hamilton woman weeping for? It seemed plain enough to me then. They were all angry and sad because my husband was going to their bungalow and eating their fine dinners without being made to love her. If he had been loving her and flirting with her they would all have been happy. Such a fine thing it is considered to be favoured by the smiles of a colonial magistrate.

I smiled, not alarmed for myself now, because I had heard of her weeping; and so very pleasantly the work of making my bar look beautiful and shining came to an end. It looked comfortable, did my bar, sparkling where the sun shafts played on glittering glass and polished pewter. When the servants had gone I myself arranged a vase of alamanda blossom and placed it on the mahogany counter. Then I sat down peacefully—a morning's work well done is as soothing as a good dinner—and took up my sewing. Before that, of course, I had been to my bedroom to change my gown for a white one and arrange my thick, dark

hair at my mirror. In spite of all my troubles I still looked beautiful. Certainly no need to feel alarm about that chit of a Hamilton woman.

"A greedy gobbler she is," I mused. "Wanting first Mr. Guiy and then my husband. And now she will get neither. How stupidly she has arranged matters. But then, of course, she is not very clever and could not be expected to play her game skilfully. China dolls have pretty faces, but where are the brains?"

When I had got up that morning I had formed the intention of going down to the bazaar to cross-question the Chinese shop-keepers skilfully concerning this woman's doings at the Pawkers' rubber estate. I decided now there was no need. She was weeping, this Hamilton, and my husband plainly enough was laughing up his sleeve at her, and Mr. Lloyd Guiy had gone away disgusted at her falseness, probably. So old Mr. Fernandez and the servants had told me. There was no need for me to stir. And after tiffin I would have my siesta. I needed it, for cleaning out the bar room was tiring work. I gazed drowsily out of doors into that dazzling ocean of golden light. Gentle breezes now blew. I heard the silken rustle of the palms. The lawn was vivid green. I saw a scarlet fly-catcher, little bigger than a butterfly, hovering about the eaves of the porch. The sun filled my eyes. I must have fallen asleep, peaceful sleep.

And then suddenly from the door: "Can I get anything to drink, Mrs. Roga, I mean Mrs. Fernandez?"

I opened my eyes. It was Mr. Guiy. I sat up, patting my hair. "Good-morning, Mr. Guiy."

I slid off my high chair and advanced to the counter with an inquiring air, endeavouring not to betray my surprise at such an early visit.

"Er—er—a brandy and soda," he said. "Er—if you please, Mrs. Roga," and then stood leaning over the counter, his head dropped moodily.

Brandy and soda, and he so young! Something tragic about such an order so early in the day, something sinister, hinting perhaps at broken hearts! And there was even such a sad atmosphere about him. What could it mean? I felt at once intensely curious. But we of the bar, barristers and barmaids, must strangle all emotion. Unflinching as stone must be we instruments of fate. In spite of that my woman's heart told me not to give him too much brandy with the soda so early in the morning. But then to have given him too little for his money would not have been honest.

"You are a great stranger, Mr. Guiy," I remarked in my cool, professional voice. I picked up a duster and began to rub a glass.

"I have been away."

"Oh, indeed?" My tones must have told him that I was but little interested in his movements. "And have you been back long?" I inquired carelessly, after a pause. You see, I had thought he was still absent from Sudora.

"I came back in this morning's boat."

"Oh! It is so nice landing in the morning—so cool."

He took a big gulp from the glass. Poor boy, he did look worried about something, so pale, and marks under his eyes.

"Oh yes, nice enough. We got in quite early, but I've been—er—looking at a garden before I came on here."

"Did you enjoy your trip? There is plenty of bustle and liveliness at Pelung," I said languidly. "And now I hear they have even started two of these new picture palaces. Were you taking a holiday? Ah, you planter gentlemen, you take so many holidays."

"No, I went down to get coolies."

So many people want coolies now with all this rubber planting beginning in the country. Good ones are difficult to obtain. It seemed funny to me that Mr. Pawker should have sent such a young, inexperienced gentleman to get coolies at Pelung. One is so easily cheated there.

"And were you successful? Did you bring many back?" I asked dispassionately.

"Er—er——"

His hesitation made me glance upwards. Under my keen gaze he reddened, then sought to hide his confusion behind the tumbler. How alike all men are!

"They will be pleased to work for you, Mr. Guiy," I said with a friendly smile. "Mr. Pawker is, I have heard, such a nice man; and you I know—you are my 'best man,' are you not? Do you remember the wedding? A funny wedding, was it not? And Ferdinand's coat, the stupid fellow! Well, Mr. Guiy, you are not an ordinary customer, are you? We have had our adventures together. The gambling and then the wedding! Oh no, we shall not forget each other, shall we, Mr. Guiy?"

He smiled slightly in an abstracted sort of way, fingering his empty glass.

"Ah, I see you had forgotten the wedding already," I laughed, rather piqued because I did not think he had heard what I had said.

"The wedding!" He looked at me, rather startled it appeared for the moment. "Oh, your wedding. Oh, I understand. Stupid of me, I was thinking of something else. Very unpardonable, but I— Yes, that was a jolly wedding. I enjoyed it."

"Weddings are catching, you know, Mr. Guiy," I said, bantering him.

"So I have heard," he returned, with a painful smile. How feeble were the fingers that fluttered so spasmodically about the rim of the glass!

"May I not wish you happiness soon also?" Not so bantering now was my voice, but with a note of softness in it. "With that young lady, that Miss Hamilton?"

He shook his head. "Me? Oh no," he said unsteadily. "Oh no, I am not so fortunate."

"I am sorry," I cried. And I was. It was true, then, what they had told me, that this Hamilton woman no longer cared for him. Until that moment I had not believed it.

"But perhaps your luck will turn," I went on. "You are young yet, so is she. She will change her mind. You will make her change her mind. Yes, you will."

He shook his head, looking at me hesitatingly. He thought me impertinent, perhaps. I knew I had

risked that. But he knew, too, that, even on the first day we met, he had given away a little of his secret, that his love for that woman was not concealed from me. I am sympathetic with those who attract me, everybody will tell you that. Many give me their confidences, spoken or unspoken. He had already given me some of his, and now my kind eyes were resting full upon him and they said: "Poor, lonely, troubled lad! here am I, ready to comfort you and to listen to your troubles."

"Mrs. Roga," he began, "I don't think I shall be in Sudora much longer. In fact, I'm certain—I—I'm going to leave."

"Why, what's the matter?"

"Oh, nothing much."

"It is, I am sure. Is it about your lady love? Tell me. I'm only behind the bar here, but then I'm not only that. You and I know each other so well, and I'm so much acquainted with the country and the people, and so much older than you, too. Has she left you?"

"It doesn't matter. What's the good? Besides, it's too—too late!"

"It's never too late. Come, cheer up."

"It is not only that that makes me leave," he went on. "In any case I'm finished. I left Pelung, left all the coolies anywhere and hurried back, all because of a letter. That means the sack. I thought I should be in time and I'm not. Now I've got here it's all for nothing. I can't interfere now. Besides, what's the use?"

"Is it—about Miss Hamilton and Mr. Baylers?" I

asked, with a catch of anxiety in my voice. What could it be that was too late?

He nodded miserably. "It was all right up to the time I was sent away. Perhaps I ought not to tell you, but you—you are so kind, so motherly. I never dreamt—and then they sent me away all in a hurry. I got the letter from her at Pelung only yesterday, saying that it was for my sake, and that she wished me luck and I would settle down, and that she—she—was now engaged to Mr. Baylers. What did she mean 'for my sake'? I don't know."

"Engaged to Mr. Baylers?" I cried, clutching the counter. "Oh!" I felt myself grow white. "Engaged?"

He nodded. "I thought she hated him," he muttered, as if to himself. "She always said so. It is all so strange, so mysterious. And I was helpless. If I'd only been there!"

"Been where?" He meant, of course, on the estate, but just then my faculties were straying. The harshness that had crept into my voice made him look at me.

"Why, you look quite ill, Mrs. Roga," he said quickly. "I did not want to upset you with my troubles."

"You're not upsetting me. I'm very—I'm very interested. I—I should like to help you."

"What can I do? I can only go away."

"What can you do? What can you do? Oh, you boy, I shall be angry!" I had burst suddenly into passionate speech. "You would go away like a whipped dog and leave her to him. Hasn't she ever

loved you? Yes, I know she has. I heard her speak to you in the church. What can you do? Do what any man of my race or your own would do. Take her, carry her away, love her, make her all yours. What do you think love is that you would make it with kid gloves on? Oh, you feeble boy! You ask me what you can do!"

"It's too late," he said.

"I myself will aid you. Take courage. I also am determined. Rest assured it shall never be allowed, this marriage of Baylers and Hamilton."

"Too late."

"It's not," I screamed. "You weak, timid fellow, I tell you it shall never be allowed. I shall——"

"Too late," said he, raising a hand with a certain dignity. "Listen then."

I ceased speaking, awed by the misery written on his face.

"Listen," he said. "The church bells!"

And at that moment a little stronger breeze blew open the farther shutters. In burst the clanging melody, ringing, rippling, loud, defiant, and then the breeze slackened and the sound grew faint.

"The bells! Yes, I hear," I whispered. My voice sounded to me like a stranger's. I was something quite severed from it. The beating of my heart, my breath, they were so difficult.

"What does this ringing mean?" I gasped. "What does it mean?"

"It means they are being married now," he murmured in a broken sort of way. "Oh dear! She wanted me to go to the wedding, to shew her that we

were still friends. I got her letter on the quay this morning when we landed. But—but I can't. I can't."

He covered his face with his hands, leaning there on my counter. A sob or two escaped him. Oh, Baylers, oh, my husband, if ever you read this, know that it is well for you that you were not there then, that the bent head there was not yours, nor yet the back, so handy for the knife! I could have killed you then, I hated you so; and her worse. And then I thought—and I thought, swaying and clinging, dry-eyed, to the counter: "Marry her then, you fool, you Baylers, yes, marry her, the creature that has taken you from me. And when you come back, both of you from your honeymoon, I will meet you on the quay with my marriage certificate." Yes, Hamilton, I had it in my power then to make you taste shame! But I did not. Why? I don't know. Perhaps I felt something—let me call it pity for you, yes, for you. Perhaps it was anger against my husband, a determination that he should never win against me. Perhaps, Lloyd Guiy, it was sorrow for you: yes, though you may deny it now, I saw the tears oozing through your fingers as you leant there on my counter. That's why I tapped you on the shoulder, Lloyd Guiy. Yes, I think that was my greatest reason for saving you two, those tears.

I said to him so firmly and sharply that he looked up: "Mr. Guiy! Baby! What do you mean? It's not too late. Here, you must run. Listen! Mr. Baylers is married already. Yes, I tell you, married to me, to me, to me."

"To you?" he gasped. "But you are married to Ferdin——"

“ Look then, stupid ! ” From my bosom I tore my marriage certificate. Never before had it left my possession ; never since. “ See ! Can you read, stupid ? See, Baylers’ name and mine. Take it ! Run to the clergyman. Quick ! Quick ! Quick ! And bring me back my certificate, or I’ll never speak to you any more ! ”

Oh, he can run, can Mr. Guiy.

CHAPTER XXVII

THOSE days of strained anxiety and passion are now gone from me, I hope for ever. The illness called living few can support for long in its acute form. Periods of vegetation supervene, allowing the nervous system to recuperate, sleep relieves, and, last refuge of all, men and women flee to drugs and drink in order to gain respite. Am I happy now sitting here in my Paddington lodging in solitude and grandeur with many white women to wait on me, with white men as coachmen to drive me where I list? If not, I ought to be. And yet——?

To tell the truth, my husband Baylers, the colonial magistrate, is rather a disappointment. I have come to the conclusion that he drinks too much. He leaves me a great deal to myself, being so busy, he says, with affairs of the Government. Also he tells me it is the custom when one is on furlough to burn the candle at both ends. I myself think it providential for the young men of London that a candle has not three ends. Yes, there are so many things I could improve in this London.

I shall not stay and do so. No. I await the hour when our furlough shall be ended and we shall sail over the glittering water, back to the East. Oh, my dear land, how I long for you! Never will I come to this city of smoke and gloom again.

I have nothing to say against the people here. They have been very kind. They seem to know too that I am the wife of a colonial magistrate, and stare at me, always respectfully, when I go abroad. This annoys my husband, who tells me to dress more quietly. Stupid man, to be so modest ! He will never be a governor ! Ever since our marriage he has become more and more modest, more and more silent. I try to rouse him. I try to make him go out with me into society, to mix with all these fine ladies whom he knew as a bachelor. But he will not. This makes me vexed with him, because these ladies are fond of my company. I know they are, for when I meet them they are very nice to me.

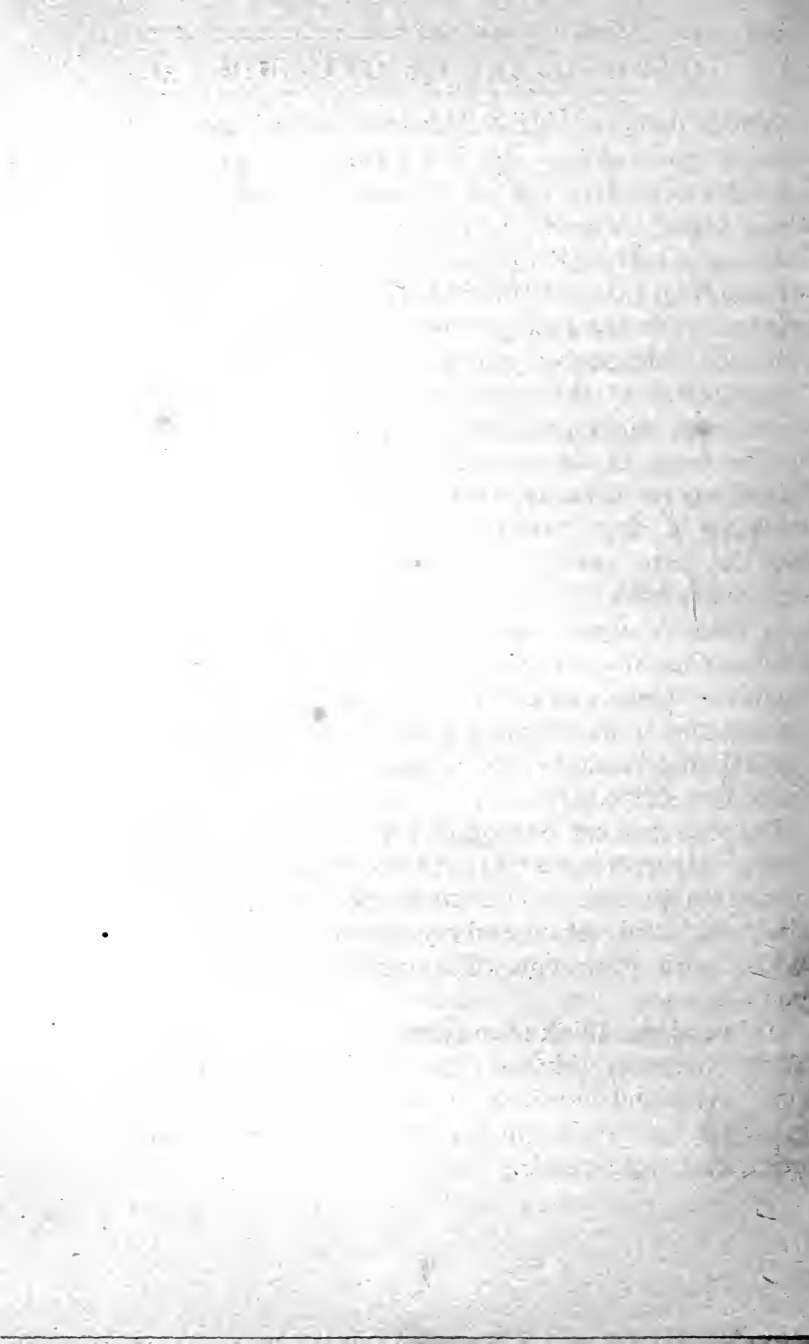
Of course that Hamilton woman tried to make mischief, saying to all the white ladies, so I hear, that I was a dangerous creature and that I had tried to entrap Lloyd Guiy. It was some tale she had been told at the time she was trying to marry my husband Baylers, and for long she believed it. But I do not think she can believe it now—not that I care ; she has heard different. Two months ago she married Lloyd, poor boy. She brought him to England at once, the prize, I understand, she went out East to capture. They are settled somewhere on the south coast of France, where she has purchased a silkworm farm. And Lloyd has been made manager. They say he promises to be very successful ; he handles the silkworms so tenderly. So she counts no longer. I shall never see her again.

Three weeks more, three weeks more, and then we sail for our Eastern home ! This, my novel, I leave

behind in the care of Mr. Nubkins the novelist, to touch up, but not to alter. He is a good fellow, although sometimes, as you will have gathered, reader, from these pages, we have our differences. He takes, for instance, a better view of the conduct of the Hamilton woman than I do. Again, in his opinion, this novel of mine propounds a new problem. He points out that, although distinguished people have written concerning the relations of the sexes and have also advocated crèches for infants, nobody has yet inquired whether, in the event of the contents of the crèches getting mixed up accidentally, there will be any danger of relatives in them marrying each other later on by mistake. He himself considers, judging from my experience with Ferdinand, that instinct will step in and that the danger will be small. You remember, reader, that the thought of Ferdinand as a husband made me shiver, and also that he and Amy—they too are married now—always regarded each other with a smouldering fondness which was only too ready to burst into flame.

I myself am not concerned with problems such as these. My wish has been to tell my simple tale in such a way as to enlist the sympathies of you, in your sheltered island, for me and my sisters out there in the wilds, to win your approval, to make myself known to you all.

Think of me, think of me sometimes, women of the West ; but more, think of us all, bronze captives of the sun, veiled and unveiled, in harem, in bungalow, in grass hut, in palace, out in the fields, doing like you our work for the world.



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